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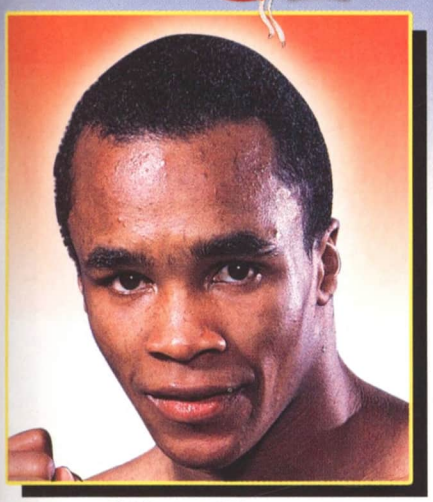
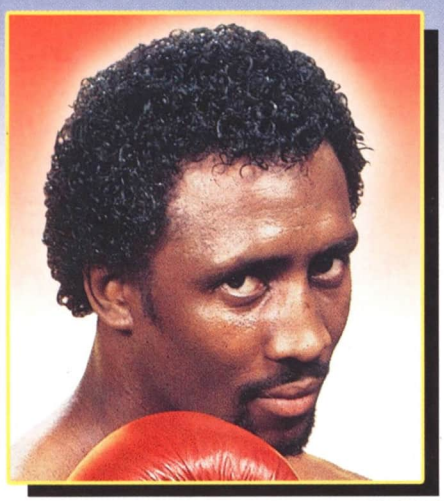
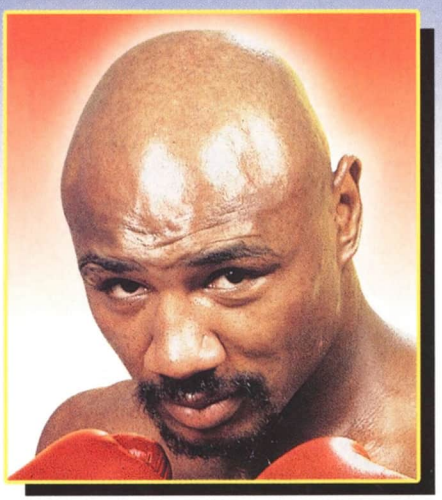
WINTER 2005

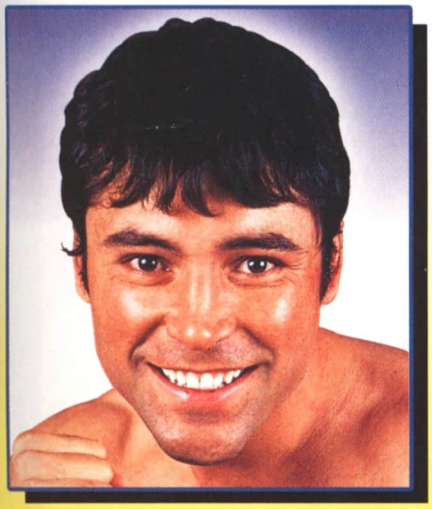


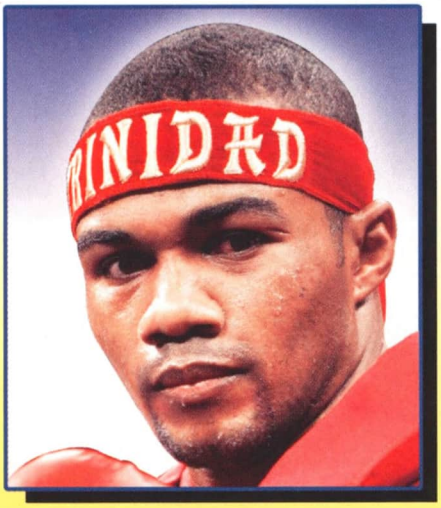


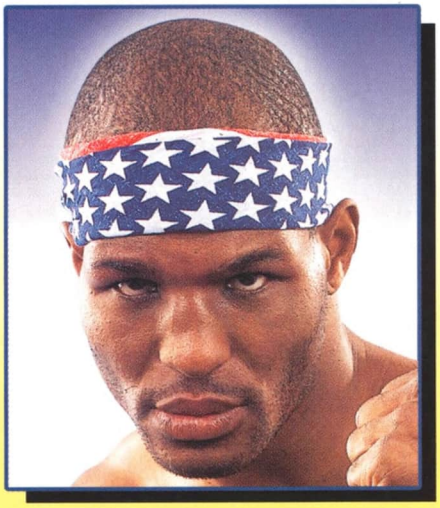


1980s VS. TODAY

Comparing The Middleweight Superstars







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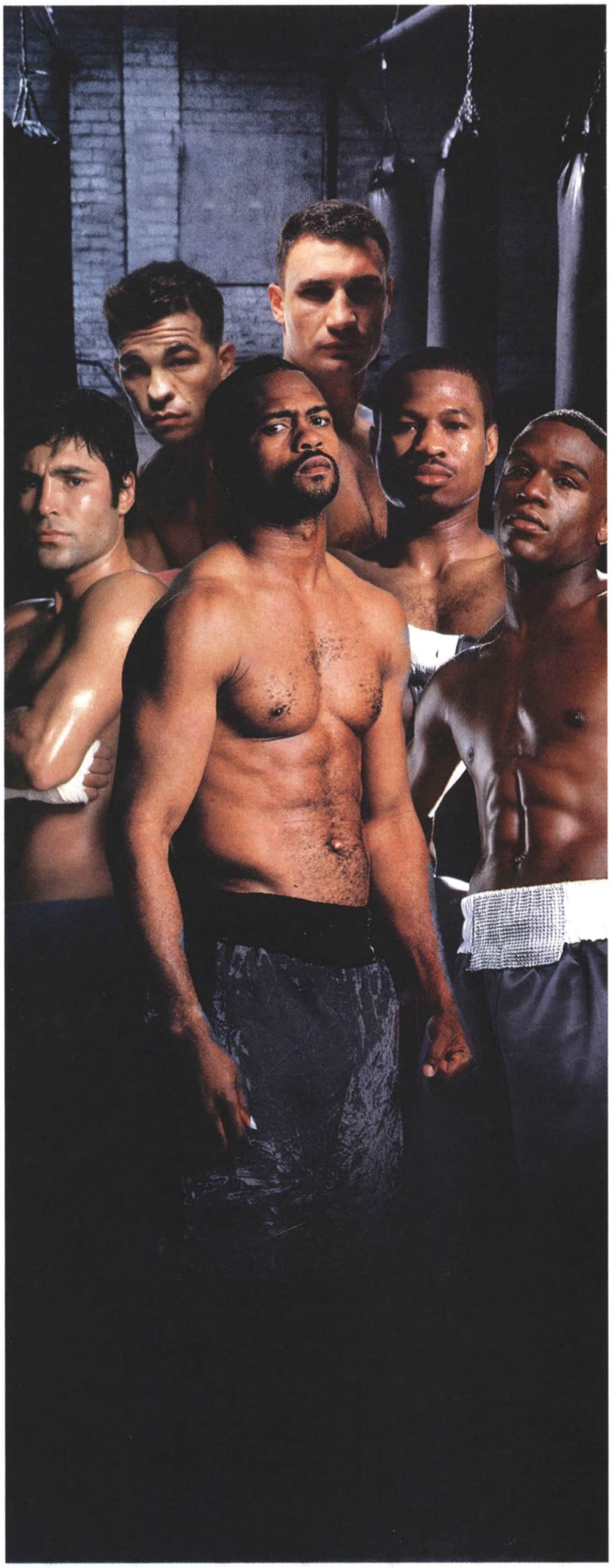

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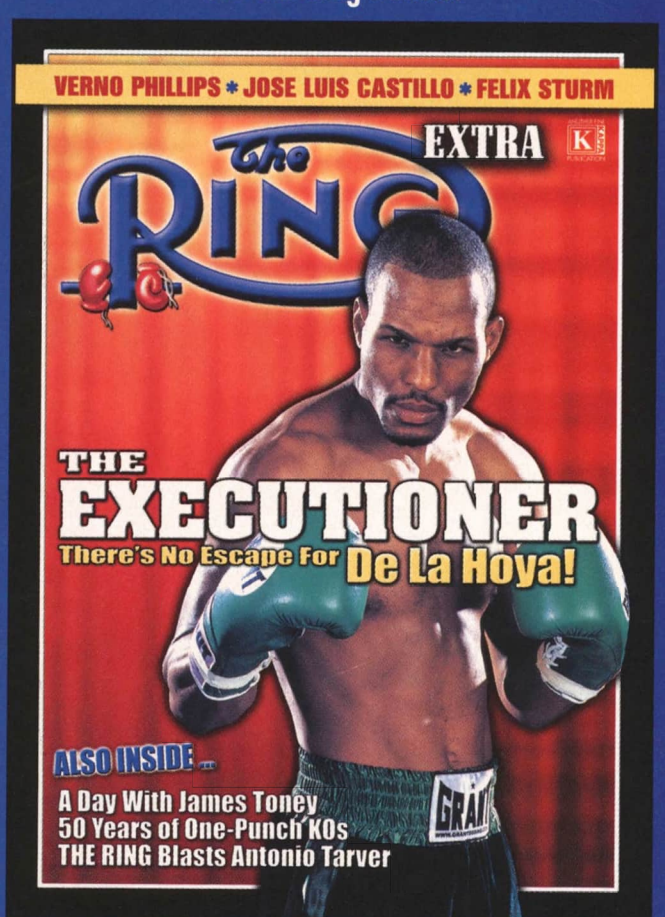

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Jim Malloy

RINGSIDE

When THE RING launched its new championship policy with the April 2002 issue, we really didn't know what kind of reception it would receive. The policy was, and remains, an attempt to restore credibility to championship boxing, and our only commercial goal is to rise along with all boats should our efforts in some way help the sport prosper.

Naturally, we've been delighted by the support we've received not only from our readers, but also from various members of the boxing industry. ESPN has been one of our earliest and strongest supporters, and HBO has also come to appreciate the value of having independent ratings and champions, unfettered by sanctioning fees and forced mandatories.

Understandably, there has also been criticism, some of it well-considered and constructive. For example, a number of philosophically sympathetic readers brought to our attention a potential glitch in our system for filling championship vacancies. Originally, there were two methods: 1) a box-off between THE RING's number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders; 2) unifying the three major alphabet belts.

But with alphabet straps so easily obtained, there was a hypothetical danger of a fighter not rated among our top three contenders acquiring all the alphabet belts and garnering a vacant RING title. Even though such an eventuality was unlikely, we removed the possibility by eliminating the alphabet titles from the equation and limiting the criteria to a box-off system. This change was announced on this page in the February '05 issue.

There has also been criticism born of misunderstanding. Our recognition of Vitali Klitschko as heavyweight champion following his knockout of Corrie Sanders seems to fall into that category, so I'll explain the thinking behind it again for all who may have missed several earlier explanations:

Klitschko was our number-one contender on the basis of his overall body of work and his near dethroning of newly retired champion Lennox Lewis. Chris Byrd was number two, thanks in part to his injury-induced TKO of Vitali. Sanders, fresh from an impressive kayo of Vitali's brother, Wladimir—who, if you recall, was briefly considered by some to be the sport's potential savior—was number three.

Under the best of circumstances we would have held out for a fight between number one and number two, but as Byrd was coming off of a pair of disappointing showings—a controversial decision over Fres Oquendo and a draw with Andrew Golota—we felt that the circumstances justified recognizing the Klitschko-Sanders winner as the new champ.

While we certainly respect people's right to disagree, it's hard to take seriously one veteran reporter's suggestion that we shouldn't have recognized Klitschko because he's not a legendary champion like Jack Dempsey (the first recipient of THE RING belt). If you follow that logic, most of the men who have held the title wouldn't qualify.

Another criticism, also from a veteran of the boxing beat, has a nastier edge and uses innuendo in place of facts, a favorite tactic of those willing to sacrifice the truth in order to advance their own agendas. He suggests that THE RING's decision to recognize Klitschko as champion is influenced by the advertising you see on this magazine's inside front cover. This is utter nonsense. Let me assure you that all decisions regarding THE RING's policies are made in-house without any outside influence whatsoever. Moreover, I challenge anyone who thinks they have evidence to the contrary to step forward and present it.

THE RING has offered a workable alternative to the self-serving chaos created by the alphabet organizations. Whenever a progressive concept gathers momentum, there are bound to be certain people, perhaps fearing a loss of influence and power, who will resist the winds of change. But like the dinosaurs, they're doomed be left behind in the dust of history.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

Volume 84, No. 2 **Winter 2005**

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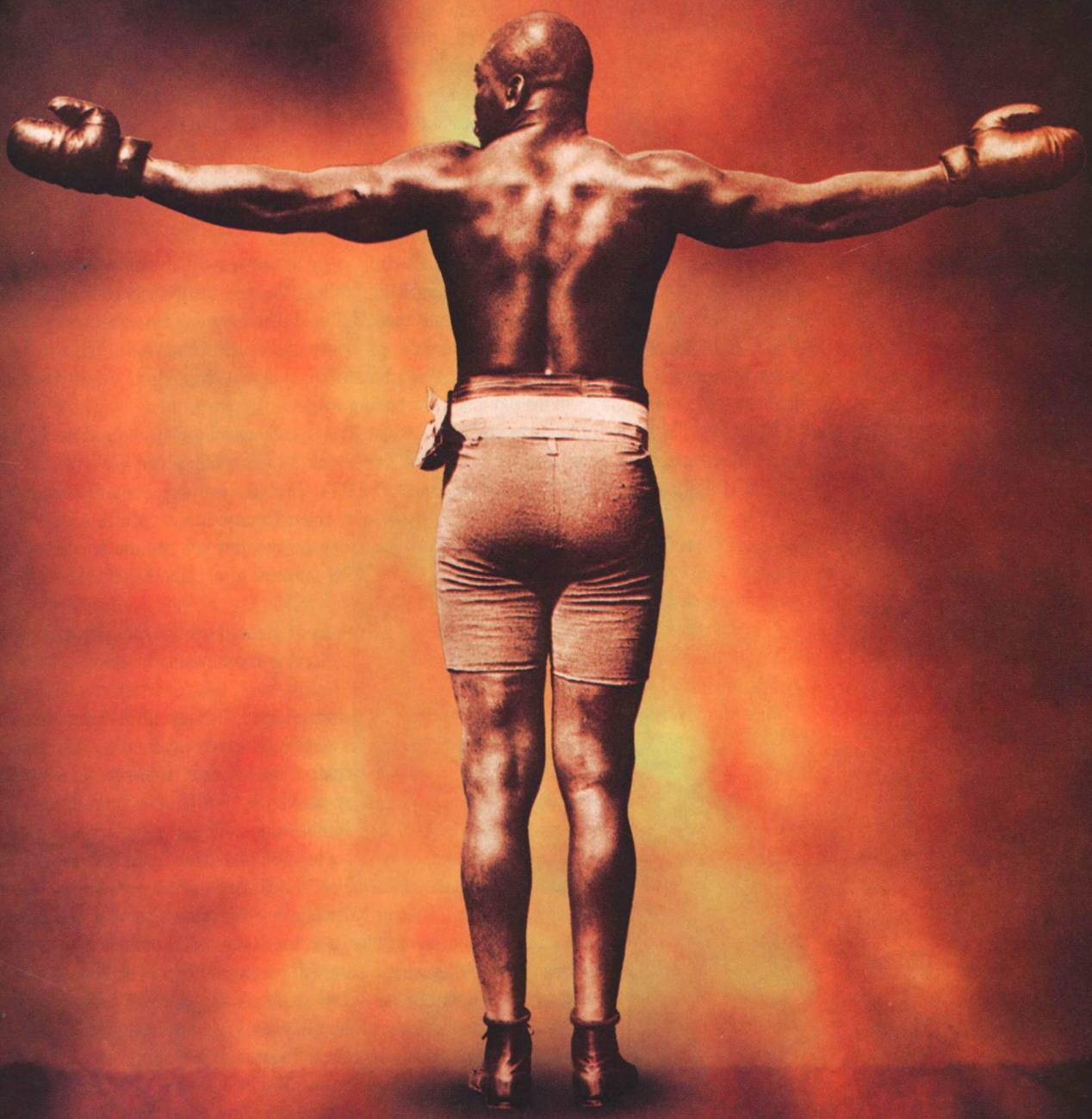
They couldn't knock him out, so they tried to tear him down.



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ROUND ONE

ESPN JOINING THE PPV PARTY

As 2004 began, ESPN seemed to be phasing out boxing, slashing licensing fees for their *Friday Night Fights* shows to the point of near-nonexistence. But as 2004 comes to a close, the outlook over at "The Worldwide Leader In Sports" is quite different. Not only will *Friday Night Fights* be back as strong as ever in '05 with 40 shows, but ESPN, after striking a deal with promoter Main Events, will also seek to become a player in the pay-per-view boxing world.

At an October press conference, ESPN and Main Events announced a deal to produce 12 boxing shows together in a one-year period beginning in November '04, including seven *FNF* telecasts, three "special" (bigger budget) ESPN broadcasts, and two PPVs. The primary players on these shows will be Main Events' best young fighters, guys like Juan Diaz, Rocky Juarez, Kermit Cintron, and Dominick Guinn. They may not be pay-per-view-ready attractions just yet, but the hope is that with added exposure on basic-cable ESPN and with the ESPN marketing machine behind them, their fan bases will reach PPV-worthy proportions quickly.

"The careers of these fighters will be exposed to legions of young fans who are virtually glued to ESPN all day long—and believe me, I have a 15-year-old son, I know what I'm talking about," said Main Events CEO Kathy Duva.

Matt Murphy, ESPN's vice president of interactive sales, noted that ESPN and ESPN2 reach more than 85 million homes each, ESPNews and ESPN Classic reach about half that many, and ESPN's Web site, radio station, and Spanish-language channel, ESPN Deportes, can all help push the pay-per-views. "We've done very successful pay-per-view business with college football and college basketball, and it seemed obvious that the next step was to get involved in boxing," said Murphy.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Duva: Worked out a major deal with ESPN

The sudden upgrade in ESPN's boxing interest owes heavily to the improved ratings on *FNF* in '04 when star fighters began appearing as guest studio analysts. The use of boxers in the studio will continue in '05, and the only change to the broadcast team will be the addition of Jeremy Schaap as a roving reporter on the pay-per-views and "special" telecasts.

While the announcement of the ESPN PPV venture was greeted with mostly positive reaction, there was a small degree of backlash over the idea of an additional network asking boxing fans to dip into their pockets. Main Events Vice President Carl Moretti had a response ready.

"The way the boxing business is right now, with the elite fighters, every consumer's paying to see them on some level. It's just a matter of whether it appears as part of their usual cable bill or as a separate charge," said Moretti. "What kills the sport is when you put events on pay-per-view that have no business being on pay-per-view. Our goal is to put together two cards next year that are worth buying."

With boxing networks and promoters, it's been a "Big Two" situation for many years: There's HBO and Showtime, then there's everybody else; and there's Don King and Bob Arum, then there's everybody else. By joining forces, ESPN and Main Events just might have given themselves a shot at making it a "Big Three" situation. That's no sure thing, but the upside potential is certainly there.

—Eric Raskin

B-HOP GETS HIS PROPS

For a city with such a rich boxing history, Philadelphia has done precious little to honor the great fighters it has produced over the years. In fact, the most prominent symbol of the Sweet Science in the City of Brotherly Love is a statue of the fictitious Rocky Balboa, which sits outside of the Wachovia Spectrum. But on October 9, Philly finally saluted one of its real-life heroes with a parade for middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins.

Fittingly, the parade began at the Blue Horizon on North Broad Street, where Hopkins fought many of his early bouts, and ended at City Hall, where he was greeted by Mayor John Street and an assortment of dignitaries. Several marching bands and drills teams accompanied the champ, as did former heavyweight king Joe Frazier, who rode in a convertible, along with his son, Marvis, and daughter, Jacqui Frazier-Lyde.

Hopkins also began the parade riding in a convertible, but soon abandoned the vehicle and ran down the middle of Broad Street, surrounded by fans, many of whom joined him in the impromptu jog.

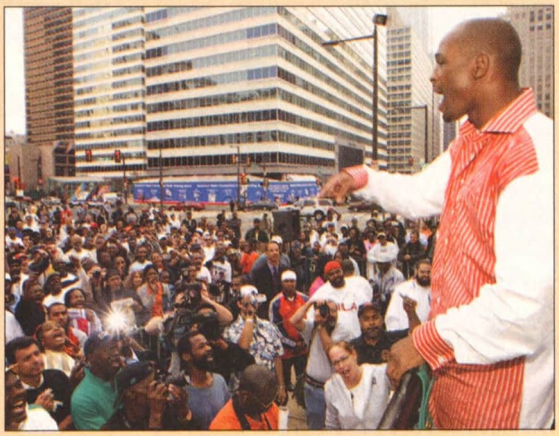
"I wanted everyone to see me and be part of the celebration, which is why I got out of the car and ran for six or seven blocks until the police asked me to ride again," Hopkins told the *Philadelphia Daily News*. "It was my way of showing that I'm not just fighting for myself and my family; I'm representing the city of Philadelphia every time I enter the ring."

Many of the fans accompanied Hopkins all the way to City Hall, where they joined the awaiting crowd, chanting his name and flashing the cross-armed X-sign that has become Hopkins' trademark.

Mayor Street presented Hopkins with a proclamation and several gifts, and also read a letter of congratulations from John Kerry. There were a number of other speeches and presentations, including a box of RING magazines featuring Hopkins' knockout victory over Oscar De La Hoya on the cover. Although he didn't speak long, Hopkins' trainer, Bouie Fisher, packed the biggest punch of the afternoon when he said that Hopkins was the best fighter since Sugar Ray Robinson.

When Hopkins spoke, he pointed out how close he was standing to the courtroom where he'd been convicted of strong-armed robbery, and how his experience proves that people can turn their lives around by going straight and working hard to achieve their dreams. It was a message aimed at the many inner-city kids in the crowd, but one that rang true. The proof was right in front of them, basking in an outpouring of love and respect in the shadow of the building where he was once led away in handcuffs.

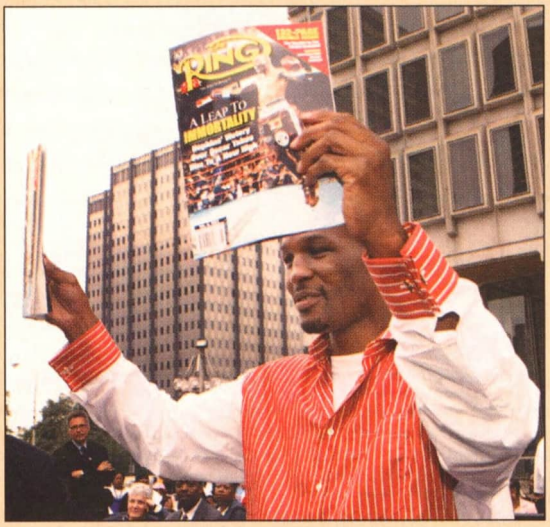
—Nigel Collins



A sizeable crowd came out to honor the champ

PHOTOS BY CHRIS FARINA

Hopkins cruises down Broad Street



"The Executioner" shows off his new RING mags

TV FIGHTS OF THE MONTH

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
10-15-04	Miguel Hernandez KO 4 Christopher Holt	Telef	sm	D+	C+	C+
Holt tough as all get out, but when a guy can't get out of the way of a single left hook, it's hard for him to win						
10-15-04	Cesar Bazan W 10 Francisco Campos	Telef	jw	C+	B-	B-
Can anyone remember the last time Bazan didn't bleed all over the ring?						
10-22-04	Juan Carlos Rubio D 10 Adrian Mora	Telef	w	C+	B+	B
Spoiler Rubio does it again, but we wouldn't argue if it had gone to Mora; good fight						
10-22-04	Daniel Ponce DeLeon KO 3 Emmanuel Lucero	Telef	jf	B-	B-	B+
Ponce DeLeon proof that if you can hit hard enough, you don't have to know how to fight						
10-22-04	Lenin Arroyo W 6 Jose Roman	Telem	l	C-	C+	A-
Who said rematches are no good? Excellent brawl from start to finish						
10-22-04	Edel Ruiz W 12 Victor Santiago	Telem	f	C+	B-	D-
Don't you hate it when a guy waits until the last round to start fighting, and he wins that round?						
10-22-04	Agnaldo Nunez D 8 Isidro Granados	Show	jl	C	A	B+
Except for the two times he was floored, Nunez had slight edge; good, even scrap between two tough, skilled guys						
10-22-04	Mike Arnaoutis KO 1 Jesse Feliciano	Show	jw	C+	A-	C
Feliciano's hilarious prefight staredown with the TV camera went longer than the fight did						
10-28-04	Kendrick Releford W 12 Eliecer Castillo	HBOL	h	C	C+	C+
Upset! Releford too slick for Castillo, who is a different guy every time he shows up						
10-28-04	Kingsley Ikeke KO 5 Rene Arostegui	HBOL	sm	B-	D+	C
The difference between a guy who's fought a couple of good fighters and a guy who's fought no good fighters						
10-29-04	Edwin Vazquez W 12 Ruben Fuchu	Telef	w	C	B-	C
Proof that an Olympic background is no substitute for hard fights against solid pros						
10-29-04	Henry Bruseles Tech. Draw 3 Ener Julio	Telef	w	C+	C-	D
Headbutt saves Julio from a long beating and fourth consecutive loss						
11-4-04	Jorge Lacierva D 10 Armando Guerrero	ESPN2	jf	B-	C+	C+
What's the over/under next year for how many bad decisions it'll take to make Atlas' head explode?						
11-4-04	Juan Diaz W 12 Julien Lorcy	ESPN2	l	B+	B+	B
Closer than the scores reflected; what were the judges using, electronic scoring machines?						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship title fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net; Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino

JAMES BUTLER CHARGED WITH MURDER

Although a judge and jury will ultimately decide if James "The Harlem Hammer" Butler is guilty of murdering Sam Kellerman, nobody who saw Butler's cowardly attack of Richard Grant on November 23, 2001, would doubt that Butler was capable of such a vile act. That was the night Butler was led away in handcuffs after sucker-punching Grant with a taped fist in the aftermath of their bout at New York City's Roseland Ballroom, which Grant won via decision.

Butler, who was incarcerated for four months after being convicted of assaulting Grant, is currently back behind bars in Los Angeles, where he is being held on $1.25-million bail, charged with killing Kellerman, the 29-year-old brother of Max Kellerman, the former studio host of ESPN2's *Friday Night Fights*. Butler pleaded not guilty.

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Referee Mike Ortega tries to control Butler after Grant incident

Butler resumed boxing after being released from Rikers Island, claiming that he'd been rehabilitated thanks to anger management therapy and medication he was taking for a bipolar disorder. However, his comeback did not go well, and Butler, 20-5 (12), won only two of his four post-prison bouts before being arrested for Kellerman's murder. In Butler's most recent bout, he lost a 10-round decision to Omar Sheika on August 10, 2004.

The Kellerman brothers had known Butler for a number of years, having been introduced by trainer Alexander Newbold, who worked with both Butler and the Kellermans at Gleason's Gym. A friendship developed and the fighter appeared with them in a rap video called "Rumble Young Man, Rumble."

Sam Kellerman stuck by Butler, even after he was jailed for assaulting Grant, visiting the boxer while he was imprisoned and writing a sympathetic column about him for foxsports.com. Therefore, it wasn't too surprising that when the down-on-his luck boxer needed a place to live, Sam, an aspiring actor and freelance sportswriter, allowed Butler to stay with him at his Hollywood apartment. Butler had told Kellerman that he had a bout scheduled in California, but according to the California Athletic Commission, Butler did not have a boxing license in the state.

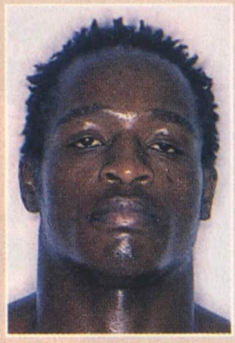
Los Angeles police believe that Butler killed Kellerman on October 12, 2004, by striking him in the back of the head with a hammer, and then set fire to Kellerman's apartment in an attempt to cover the crime. Friends of the Kellermans suspect that the killing was triggered by an argument over when Butler was going to move out of Kellerman's apartment.

"Though it would seem that Sam's fate suggests that no good deed goes unpunished," Max Kellerman told the *New York Post*, "Sam's life did not suggest that at all. It was full of good deeds. Sam believed that life came with the responsibility of empathy and kindness."

Several members of the boxing community, including former titleholders Iran Barkley and Aaron Davis, promoter Lou DiBella, and manager Frank Russo, attended Kellerman's funeral.

—Nigel Collins

OUTSIDE THE ROPES



Ndou: Ndone at age 27

We didn't get the memo in advance, but apparently October was international Announce Your Retirement From Boxing Month. The most noteworthy of the many fighters who hung 'em up was **Leonard Dorin**, the 34-year-old Canada-based Romanian who held a lightweight belt for nearly two years during a 22-1-1 (8) career. Dorin, who took part in Fight of the Year honorable mentions against **Raul Balbi** and **Paul Spadafora**, considered retiring in 2003 after experiencing weight-making difficulties. After coming back and suffering a two-round kayo defeat to **Arturo Gatti** in July '04, Dorin went ahead and called it quits in late-October … In mid-October, Danish bantamweight **Johnny Bredahl** retired while still in possession of the WBA 118-pound title. Bredahl had a defense on tap for November, but elected to end his career at age 36 because of recurring hand injuries. The only losses on his 55-2 (26) resume came against fellow titlists **Wayne McCullough** and **Paulie Ayala** … Recent world lightweight title challenger **Phillip Ndou** announced his retirement in late-October due to medical concerns. The South African "Time Bomb," who was stopped in seven rounds by **Floyd Mayweather** in '03, was scheduled to fight in November, but a brain scan detected an abnormality that, according to doctors, could "cause severe damage" if he continued fighting. Ndou, 27, finishes with a record of 31-3 (30) … Perhaps the most surprising retirement announced this month was that of middleweight prospect **Rasheem Brown**, who won his first 14 pro fights before suffering two minor upset decision losses in 2004. A discouraged Brown, 28, said goodbye with a 14-2 (12) record, and will continue to pursue his other career, as a surgical technician … A fighter who made quite a few retirement announcements, **Sugar Ray Leonard**, announced a different kind of retirement in mid-October. Leonard's promotional company, Sugar Ray Leonard Boxing, is folding after just three years. The reason seemed to be a combination of a falling out with business partner **Bjorn Rebney**, and Leonard's role in the NBC series *The Contender* taking up much of his time … Super middleweight trial-horse **Leonard Townsend** was charged in early-October with murder, attempted murder, and battery after allegedly shooting two men, killing one of them, in an incident in Gary, Indiana. The 36-year-old Chicago-based fighter faces up to 115 years in prison if convicted … Former featherweight title claimant **Richie Lemos**, 84, died in Covina, California, in late-October. The popular switch-hitter won the National Boxing Association's version of the 126-pound crown by knocking out **Petey Scalzo** in the fifth round on July 1, 1941, but didn't hold on to it very long, losing it to **Jackie Wilson** via 12-round decision on November 18, 1941. Lemos, 55-23-3 (27), was inducted into the World Boxing Hall of Fame in 1989 … Korean referee and judge **David Chung** died of an apparent heart attack in mid-October at age 57, just hours after refereeing a bout in Osaka, Japan. Chung, who was nicknamed "Smiling" because of his perpetually pleasant demeanor, officiated more than 30 major title bouts … **Joseph Dorsey**, a boxer better known for a fight he had outside the ring than for any he had inside it, died of cancer in late-October at age 69. Light heavyweight Dorsey, 27-8-1 (20), scored his most significant victory in 1957, when he battled a Louisiana law passed the previous year banning interracial bouts. Dorsey, who was black, argued that the law was unconstitutional and won in the courts.

Leonard: Dissolves SRL boxing

THE PUNCHLINES

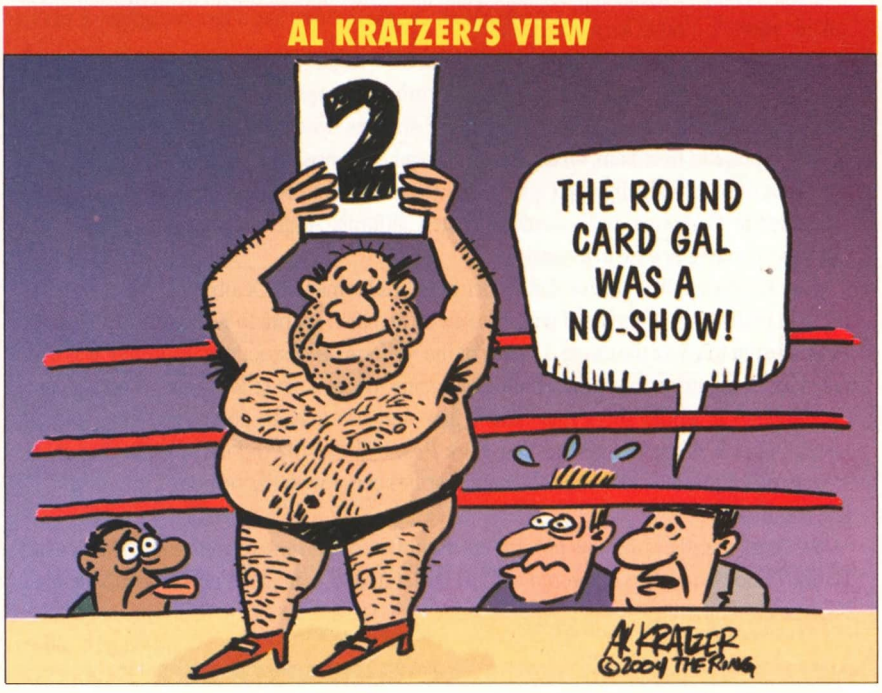
"If me and him ever do step into the ring, it's going to be a major attraction in Philadelphia. It'd be the 'Thrilla in Phila.'"

—Charles Brewer, on a possible fight with fellow Philadelphian Bernard Hopkins

"You couldn't ask for a better opponent, someone who will quit when the pressure is on."

—John Ruiz, prior to his November fight with Andrew Golota

AL KRATZER'S VIEW



"THE BIBLE OF BOXING"

RATINGS ANALYSIS

POUND-FOR-POUND

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
   Middleweight
2. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Junior Welterweight
3. **ANTONIO TARVER**
   Light Heavyweight
4. **WINKY WRIGHT**
   Junior Middleweight
5. **ERIK MORALES**
   Junior Lightweight
6. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
   Featherweight
7. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
   Featherweight
8. **KOSTYA TSZYU**
   Junior Welterweight
9. **JAMES TONEY**
   Heavyweight
10. **JOSE LUIS CASTILLO**
    Lightweight

(For the period ended November 4, 2004)

HEAVYWEIGHTS: No changes, but look for a shakeup in the wake of Don King's massive heavyweight show at Madison Square Garden on November 13.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No changes, but the showdown between Wayne Braithwaite (number one) and Jean-Marc Mormeck (number two) for THE RING's vacant title has been rescheduled for January 22.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Even though it's been more than a year since fifth-rated Dariusz Michalczewski has fought, he is scheduled to fight Fabrice Tiozzo (currently number seven) in February, and is therefore not penalized.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Markus Beyer replaces Cristian Sanavia in the 10th spot after knocking out Sanavia in their rematch.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No changes.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: Vivian Harris' knockout of Oktay Urkal pushes Urkal down from eighth to 10th. Urkal's demotion allows Lovemore Ndou (ninth last issue) and Jesse James Leija (10th last issue) to advance to eighth and ninth, respectively.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: No changes.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Salim Medjkoune (sixth last issue) hasn't won a significant fight in a long while, and falls to the eighth position. The realignment elevates Yoddamrong Sithyodthong from seventh to sixth, while Jorge Lacierva moves from eighth to seventh. Sergio Manuel Medina (10th last issue) is replaced by Daniel Ponce DeLeon, who is coming off an impressive knockout win.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: Johnny Bredahl (third last issue) exits after announcing his retirement, which boosts everybody rated below him last issue up one slot and makes room for Julio Zarate at number 10.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: No changes.

FLYWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No changes.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No changes.

POUND-FOR-POUND: No changes. ■

THE RING RATINGS

For Period Ended November 4, 2004

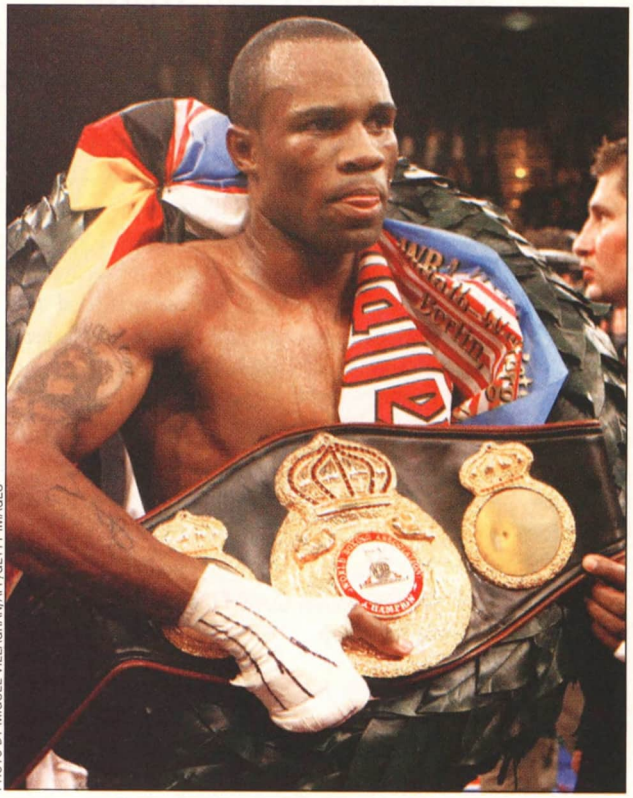


PHOTO BY MIGUEL VILLAGRAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Vivian Harris held onto his number-three rating at junior welter with a knockout of Oktay Urkal

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by THE RING are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between THE RING'S number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

Ratings By The Editors

HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Unlimited

Champ: VITALI KLITSCHKO
Ukraine 34-2 (33)

1. **CHRIS BYRD**
Flint, MI 37-2-1 (20)
2. **JOHN RUIZ**
Methuen, MA 40-5-1 (28)
3. **JAMES TONEY**
Ann Arbor, MI 68-4-2 (43)
4. **HASIM RAHMAN**
Baltimore, MD 39-5-1 (32)
5. **MONTE BARRETT**
Queens, NY 30-3 (6)
6. **ANDREW GOLOTA**
Poland 38-4-1 (31)
7. **FRES OQUENDO**
Puerto Rico 24-3 (15)
8. **JAMEEL McCLINE**
Port Jefferson, NY 31-3-1 (19)
9. **DANNY WILLIAMS**
England 32-3 (27)
10. **LAMON BREWSTER**
Los Angeles, CA 31-2 (27)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: WINKY WRIGHT
St. Petersburg, FL 47-3 (25)

1. **SHANE MOSLEY**
Pomona, CA 39-3 (35)
2. **KASSIM OUMA**
W. Palm Beach, FL 20-1-1 (13)
3. **VERNO PHILLIPS**
Aurora, CO 38-9-1 (20)
4. **DANIEL SANTOS**
Puerto Rico 29-2-1 (20)
5. **FERNANDO VARGAS**
Oxnard, CA 24-2 (22)
6. **TRAVIS SIMMS**
Norwalk, CT 24-0 (18)
7. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO**
Spain 58-5 (40)
8. **RODNEY JONES**
Lafayette, LA 34-3 (22)
9. **KOFI JANTUAH**
Las Vegas, NV 28-1 (18)
10. **BRONCO McKART**
Monroe, MI 47-6 (31)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines 38-2-2 (29)

1. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico 43-2-1 (33)
2. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
Mexico 58-4 (41)
3. **SCOTT HARRISON**
Scotland 23-2-1 (13)
4. **INJIN CHI**
South Korea 29-2-1 (18)
5. **MANUEL MEDINA**
Mexico 63-14 (29)
6. **ROCKY JUAREZ**
Houston, TX 21-0 (14)
7. **ZAHIR RAHEEM**
Tulsa, OK 25-1 (15)
8. **DERRICK GAINER**
Pensacola, FL 39-6-1 (24)
9. **MICHAEL BRODIE**
England 35-2-1 (23)
10. **CHRIS JOHN**
Indonesia 34-0 (19)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **OSCAR LARIOS**
Mexico 53-3-1 (35)
2. **ISRAEL VAZQUEZ**
Mexico 36-3 (27)
3. **MAHYAR MONSHIPOUR**
France 25-2-2 (16)
4. **JOAN GUZMAN**
Dominican Republic 21-0 (17)
5. **JOSE LUIS VALBUENA**
Venezuela 24-3-1 (14)
6. **YODDAMRONG SITHYODTHONG**
Thailand 37-1-1 (19)
7. **JORGE LACIERVA**
Mexico 26-5-5 (18)
8. **SALIM MEDJKOUNE**
France 43-5-1 (21)
9. **ART SIMONYAN**
Glendale, CA 14-0-1 (7)
10. **DANIEL PONCE DELEON**
Mexico 21-0 (20)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ**
Mexico 32-3 (29)
2. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM**
Thailand 45-1-2 (31)
3. **RATANACHAI VORAPIN**
Thailand 57-8 (39)
4. **GENARO GARCIA**
Mexico 32-4 (20)
5. **CRUZ CARBAJAL**
Mexico 24-12-1 (20)
6. **TOSHIAKI NISHIOKA**
Japan 24-4-3 (14)
7. **SILENCE MABUZA**
South Africa 16-0 (15)
8. **RICARDO VARGAS**
Mexico 36-10-3 (11)
9. **JHONNY GONZALEZ**
Mexico 25-4 (23)
10. **JULIO ZARATE**
Mexico 21-2-1 (13)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **WAYNE BRAITHWAITE**
   Guyana 21-0 (17)
2. **JEAN-MARC MORMECK**
   France 30-2 (21)
3. **JOHNNY NELSON**
   England 44-12-2 (29)
4. **O'NEIL BELL**
   Atlanta, GA 23-1-1 (22)
5. **KELVIN DAVIS**
   Reno, NV 21-2-1 (16)
6. **CARL THOMPSON**
   England 33-6 (25)
7. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
   Philadelphia, PA 16-0 (9)
8. **VIRGIL HILL**
   Bismarck, ND 49-5 (23)
9. **DALE BROWN**
   Canada 32-3-1 (20)
10. **PIETRO AURINO**
    Italy 30-2 (14)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: ANTONIO TARVER
Orlando, FL 22-2 (18)

1. **GLEN JOHNSON**
   Miami, FL 41-9-2 (28)
2. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
   Hungary 21-0 (13)
3. **ROY JONES**
   Pensacola, FL 49-3 (38)
4. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
   Huntington Beach, CA 36-2 (22)
5. **DARIUSZ MICHALCZEWSKI**
   Germany 48-1 (38)
6. **CLINTON WOODS**
   England 36-3-1 (22)
7. **FABRICE TIOZZO**
   Franco 46-2 (30)
8. **PAUL BRIGGS**
   Australia 23-1 (17)
9. **THOMAS ULRICH**
   Germany 27-1 (19)
10. **RICO HOYE**
    Detroit, MI 18-0 (14)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JOE CALZAGHE**
   Wales 38-0 (30)
2. **MANNY SIACA**
   Puerto Rico 18-4 (16)
3. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
   Australia 22-2 (17)
4. **ANTWUN ECHOLS**
   Davenport, IA 30-5-1 (26)
5. **DANNY GREEN**
   Australia 19-1 (18)
6. **CHARLES BREWER**
   Philadelphia, PA 40-9 (28)
7. **MADS LARSEN**
   Denmark 45-2 (37)
8. **ROBIN REID**
   England 37-4-1 (27)
9. **JEFF LACY**
   St. Petersburg, FL 17-0 (14)
10. **MARKUS BEYER**
    Germany 30-2 (12)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: BERNARD HOPKINS
Philadelphia, PA 45-2-1 (32)

1. **HOWARD EASTMAN**
   England 40-1 (35)
2. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA**
   Los Angeles, CA 37-4 (29)
3. **FELIX STURM**
   Germany 21-1 (9)
4. **FELIX TRINIDAD**
   Puerto Rico 42-1 (35)
5. **ROBERT ALLEN**
   Atlanta, GA 36-5 (27)
6. **WILLIAM JOPPY**
   Washington, D.C. 34-3-1 (25)
7. **JERMAIN TAYLOR**
   Little Rock, AR 21-0 (16)
8. **MASELINO MASOE**
   New Zealand 26-2 (25)
9. **KINGSLEY IKEKE**
   Canada 21-1 (11)
10. **SAM SOLIMAN**
    Australia 27-7 (9)

WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: CORY SPINKS
St. Louis, MO 34-2 (11)

1. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
   Mexico 30-4 (21)
2. **ZAB JUDAH**
   Brooklyn, NY 32-2 (23)
3. **THOMAS DAMGAARD**
   Denmark 34-0 (26)
4. **MICHELE PICCIRILLO**
   Italy 43-2 (27)
5. **MANUEL GOMEZ**
   Mexico 26-10-1 (19)
6. **KERMIT CINTRON**
   Reading, PA 24-0 (22)
7. **JAWAID KHALIQ**
   England 23-1-1 (13)
8. **CARLOS BALDOMIR**
   Argentina 40-9-6 (12)
9. **TEDDY REID**
   Adelphi, MD 22-6-1 (16)
10. **COSME RIVERA**
    Los Angeles, CA 27-7-2 (19)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: KOSTYA TSZYU
Australia 30-1 (24)

1. **SHARMBA MITCHELL**
   Washington, D.C. 55-3 (31)
2. **ARTURO GATTI**
   Jersey City, NJ 38-6 (29)
3. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
   Brooklyn, NY 25-1-1 (17)
4. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Grand Rapids, MI 32-0 (21)
5. **MIGUEL COTTO**
   Puerto Rico 21-0 (17)
6. **RICKY HATTON**
   England 37-0 (27)
7. **DeMARCUS CORLEY**
   Washington, D.C. 28-3-1 (16)
8. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
   Australia 39-7-1 (25)
9. **JESSE JAMES LEIJA**
   San Antonio, TX 47-6-2 (19)
10. **OKTAY URKAL**
    Germany 34-3 (10)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: JOSE LUIS CASTILLO
Mexico 50-6-1 (45)

1. **DIEGO CORRALES**
   Sacramento, CA 39-2 (32)
2. **JUAN LAZCANO**
   El Paso, TX 33-3-1 (25)
3. **JULIO DIAZ**
   Coachella, CA 30-2 (22)
4. **JUAN DIAZ**
   Houston, TX 26-0 (12)
5. **ACELINO FREITAS**
   Brazil 35-1 (31)
6. **JAVIER JAUREGUI**
   Mexico 48-11-2 (34)
7. **ARTUR GRIGORIAN**
   Uzbekistan 37-1 (23)
8. **JULIEN LORCY**
   France 56-4-2 (41)
9. **LAKVA SIM**
   Mongolia 19-4-1 (16)
10. **ISAAC HLATSHWAYO**
    South Africa 20-0 (9)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **ERIK MORALES**
   Mexico 47-1 (34)
2. **JOEL CASAMAYOR**
   Miami, FL 31-2 (19)
3. **JESUS CHAVEZ**
   Mexico 40-3 (28)
4. **YODSANAN NANTHACHAI**
   Thailand 43-2-1 (35)
5. **CARLOS HERNANDEZ**
   Bellflower, CA 40-4-1 (24)
6. **JORGE BARRIOS**
   Argentina 42-2-1 (30)
7. **CASSIUS BALOYI**
   South Africa 29-1 (16)
8. **MIKE ANCHONDO**
   La Puente, CA 25-0 (18)
9. **ROBBIE PEDEN**
   Australia 24-2 (13)
10. **MZONKE FANA**
    South Africa 22-2 (8)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
   Japan 27-3 (18)
2. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
   Venezuela 25-0 (24)
3. **LUIS PEREZ**
   Nicaragua 22-1 (14)
4. **IVAN HERNANDEZ**
   Mexico 19-0-1 (13)
5. **MARK JOHNSON**
   Washington, D.C. 44-4 (28)
6. **MASAMORI TOKUYAMA**
   North Korea 30-3-1 (8)
7. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
   Mexico 29-1-1 (23)
8. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
   Mexico 26-1 (16)
9. **FELIX MACHADO**
   Venezuela 22-5-1 (11)
10. **MAURICIO PASTRANA**
    Colombia 31-4-1 (21)

FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
   Thailand 53-2 (28)
2. **LORENZO PARRA**
   Venezuela 24-0 (17)
3. **IRENE PACHECO**
   Colombia 29-0 (22)
4. **MZUKISI SIKALI**
   South Africa 29-4-2 (17)
5. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
   Argentina 17-0-2 (11)
6. **ROSENDO ALVAREZ**
   Nicaragua 33-2-2 (21)
7. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
   Australia 21-0 (16)
8. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
   France 16-0 (6)
9. **HUSSEIN HUSSEIN**
   Australia 25-1 (19)
10. **LUIS MALDONADO**
    Mexico 29-0 (21)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JORGE ARCE**
   Mexico 37-3-1 (27)
2. **VICTOR BURGOS**
   Mexico 37-13-3 (22)
3. **BEIBIS MENDOZA**
   Colombia 29-3 (23)
4. **NELSON DIEPPA**
   Puerto Rico 21-1-2 (12)
5. **PICHIT SIRIWAT**
   Thailand 30-2 (14)
6. **FAHLAN SAKKREERIN**
   Thailand 50-4-2 (20)
7. **KERMIN GUARDIA**
   Colombia 35-3 (21)
8. **ULISES SOLIS**
   Mexico 14-1 (10)
9. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ**
   Panama 17-1 (14)
10. **HUGO CAZARES**
    Mexico 18-3-1 (14)

STRAWWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **YUTAKA NIIDA**
   Japan 17-1-3 (8)
2. **EAGLE KYOWA**
   Japan 13-0 (5)
3. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
   Indonesia 49-7-3 (21)
4. **DANIEL REYES**
   Colombia 34-2-1 (29)
5. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
   Mexico 32-2-1 (20)
6. **NOEL ARAMBULET**
   Venezuela 20-3-1 (10)
7. **IVAN CALDERON**
   Puerto Rico 20-0 (4)
8. **JUAN LANDAETA**
   Venezuela 15-3-1 (13)
9. **CHANA PORPAOIN**
   Thailand 50-2-3 (17)
10. **ISAAC BUSTOS**
    Mexico 22-6-3 (11)

RYAN OUT LOUD

By Jeff Ryan

DROPPING THE BALL

With lead times and printing schedules being what they are, this New Year's column is being written long before the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" and the sound of popping champagne corks are ringing in everyone's ears. It sort of makes me feel like one of the revelers on *Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve*. As the "portions recorded earlier" disclaimer reminds us, those party animals blowing noisemakers in a Hollywood studio actually taped their celebration weeks earlier. Just as soon as they toast each other and exchange kisses at fake midnight, they all head home to do their Christmas shopping.

Perhaps my having to think about 2005 earlier than planned is a good thing, though. For while 2004 provided us with some unforgettable nights (Bernard Hopkins halting Oscar De La Hoya, the return of Felix Trinidad, Roy Jones getting leveled *twice*), it wasn't a particularly dazzling year for the Sweet Science. There weren't enough superfights. Injuries shelved the always exciting Kostya Tszyu for a long stretch. Lennox Lewis retired and stayed retired, and no one took his place as the clear-cut king of the big men.

Here's hoping 2005 has a lot more to offer. Along with my fresh outlook is a fresh list of New Year's resolutions. (And no, wise guys, the odds of me sticking to them are *not* longer than the odds that Tony Ayala Jr. will be named San Antonio's Man of the Year.)

In 2005, your trusty columnist does solemnly swear to …

1) Do a better job of tolerating the heavyweights: Admittedly, this isn't going to be easy for someone who came of age as a fan during the Ali-Frazier-Foreman-Norton-Lyle-Shavers-Quarry Era. Just look at THE RING's current ratings. Chris Byrd and John Ruizzzz are two of the three best big men on the planet? It's hard to imagine them being in the top three on Jupiter. James Toney? Wasn't he once a middleweight? And *Andrew Golota*? In the top 10? Of what? Boxing mental cases?

Regardless, I'm vowing to ignore all that, view the spit bucket as two percent full and not 98 percent empty, and convince myself that if this is all we have, well, it's all we have. There's still a chance Vitali Klitschko will eventually establish himself as a notch above the pack. And even if he doesn't, I promise to resist the temptation to start referring to the Page-Tubbs-Berbick-Bonecrusher Era as "the good old days."

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

It won't be easy, but Ryan vows to tolerate these guys

2) Stop nagging fighters about retiring: If there's one thing more tiresome than stubborn warriors pushing on past their prime, it's stubborn writers pointing out how they're defacing their legacies and risking injury. So from now on, if Jones, Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, Johnny Tapia, and the rest want to keep doing bad impersonations of the all-time greats they

once were, fine. It's their cerebrums.

3) Learn to appreciate Laila Ali: She's cocky and a poor sport, but for a change this year, I won't be rooting for her inherited Louisville lip to get fattened. Ali is good for women's boxing and its long-term future. (Whether or not I even want it to have a long-term future is an entirely separate matter.) Dominance, we've come to learn in light of the parity in the men's game, is a good thing. Knowing who *the* best female fighter in the world is gives the sport an identity and its competitors a single goal for which to strive. No chaos. No confusion.

And, thus, no more Laila-lambasting from me.

4) Visit the resting places of some all-time greats: Did this past Halloween put me in a ghoulish mood? Perhaps, but considering that Rocky Marciano and Sonny Liston are two of my all-time favorites, I should have stopped by "The Rock's" gravesite in Fort Lauderdale or photographed Liston's headstone in Las Vegas on one of my many trips to those outposts. Those oversights will be rectified this year.

While I'm at it, I'll also take a ride out to Southampton, Long Island, and the burial place of Jack Dempsey and make the 10-minute trek from my New York City home to the cemeteries where "Gentleman" Jim Corbett and Benny Leonard were laid to rest.

5) Attend a card at Philadelphia's Spectrum: Believe it or not, I've yet to see a fight at Broad Street's beer-stained bunker of brawls. The alleged setting for the climactic scene of *Rocky* has played host to an array of beloved battlers including Joe Frazier, Roberto Duran, Bernard Hopkins, Marvin Hagler, Jeff Chandler, Matthew Saad Muhammad, Willie "The Worm" Monroe, Cyclone Hart, and Bennie Briscoe. Not to mention Dave Schultz, Don Saleski, and all the other goons who padded their kayo records when hockey's Flyers used to call the joint home.

The Wachovia Spectrum, as it's known these days, doesn't host many cards anymore, but you can still catch a B-level show there once in a while. Save me a seat.

6) Watch more bouts on Univision, Telefutura, and Telemundo: Two years of high school Spanish won't help much, but guys shaking off uppercuts and digging left hooks to the liver has always been a universal language.

7) Join the West Side Coalition: That's a group of community activists who are opposed to the construction of a massive stadium on Manhattan's West Side. If built, the ballpark would be the centerpiece of the 2012 Olympics (should New York be awarded them) and the home of the NFL's Jets. And because it would have a retractable roof, it would also host every kind of event from concerts to boxing.

And that's the problem. Madison Square Garden, which sits just three blocks east of the construction site and is a major foe of the project, fears it would lose out on future big fights. And let's face it, watching a bout in a football dome full of empty seats and divided by large curtains can't compare to experiencing it in the most famous boxing venue on earth. Count on me to do my part to assure that there are enough rallies, lawsuits, and environmental studies to keep the stadium from being ready for the Olympics in 3012, let alone 2012.

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

Gatti-Dorin: Not quite the Fight of the Year

8) Meet all my deadlines: Starting with the next column. And if not that one, then the one after that. Okay, okay, in a worst-case scenario, the one after the one after that.

9) Expand my video library: For someone who has been covering the game for two decades, my fight film collection is pretty sparse. A recent inventory turned up the three Ali-Norton bouts, Leonard-Hagler, Tyson-Douglas, and, well, that's about it. (Damn, I could have sworn I had those clips of Moises Pedroza's pro debut around here somewhere.)

With ESPN Classic getting more airtime in my house than HBO, CNN, and The Weather Channel combined, and a stack of blank videotapes sitting in my closet, it's time to assume the role of the poor man's Bill Cayton and preserve the great battles. A note to the folks at ESPN Classic: Is there any way you can replay Foreman-Lyle, Gomez-Pintor, and Gatti-Ward I, II, and III all on the same snowy Saturday afternoon this February?

10) Avoid selecting the Fight of the Year before it occurs: Remember when yours truly practically guaranteed that Arturo Gatti-Leonard Dorin was going to be a classic? It was a classic all right, a classic case of holding the victory ceremony before the runners crossed the finish line. Though in Dorin's case, it was more like a crawl across the finish line on his hands and knees.

And speaking of crawling across a finish line …

11) Run a 10K: The 5K has been my masochistic distance of choice in recent years, and every race leaves me wishing that I'd never been so stupid as to buy a pair of running shoes in the first place. But it's about time my heart and lungs got an appreciation for what fighters go through and how truly tough these guys really are. For me, the 10K (6.2 miles) distance is a climb up Mt. Everest. For boxers, it's just routine roadwork before they go to the gym later in the day for some *real* training.

12) Lower my expectations of athletes in other sports: Whenever my work takes me to an NBA, NFL, or Major League Baseball locker room, I'll remind myself long before I walk through the door and into a world of athletes hiding in the trainer's room, extended hands that go unshaken, 45-second interviews, and public relations people who act more like armed border guards than media facilitators, that there are two kinds of athletes in the world: fighters and everyone else. ■

CAMERA CLICKS

PHOTO BY JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES

Encouraged by the phenomenal success of Roger Clemens in 2004, the Houston Astros are now signing up every fortysomething athlete they can find. At age 42, however, Evander Holyfield, pictured after throwing out the opening pitch at an Astros playoff game, has gotten pretty darned slow with his delivery to the plate, and he doesn't get out of the way of line drives up the middle like he used to.

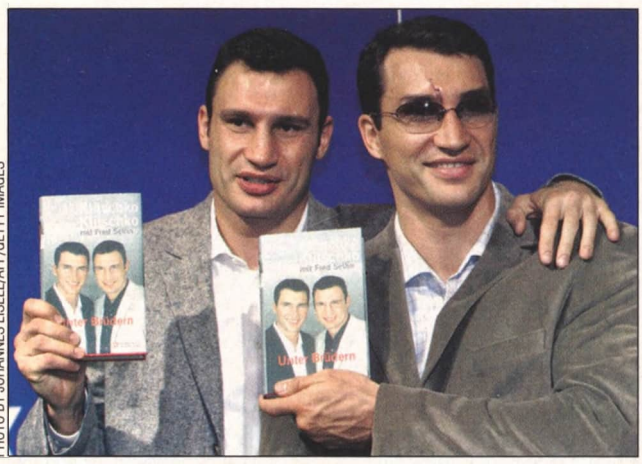


PHOTO BY JOHANNES EISELE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

We don't know if it will get endorsed by the Oprah Book Club, but Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko have penned an autobiography, written in German, entitled Among Brothers. *Fans of Vitali will want to pick up the sturdy, hardcover version, whereas Wladimir fans might find the paperback release more appropriate.*

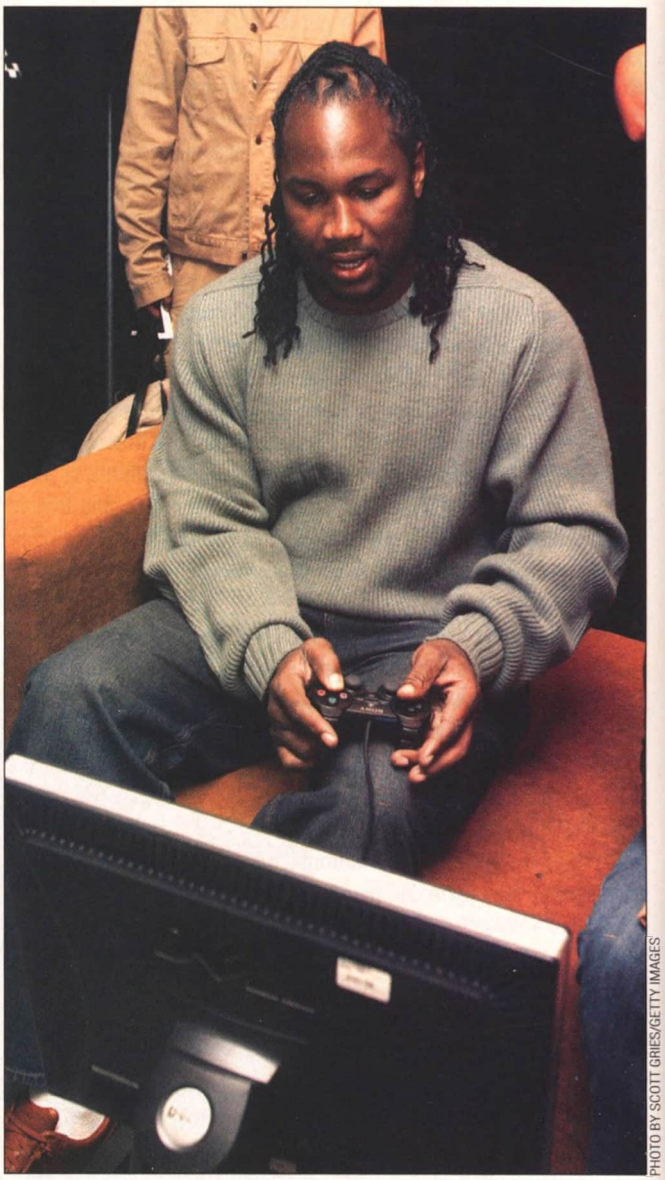


PHOTO BY SCOTT GRIES/GETTY IMAGES

One of the many perks of being retired and exceedingly wealthy is that you can sit around playing video games as much as you like. Here, former heavyweight champ Lennox Lewis samples a game at a recent event sponsored by Playstation 2 at Hammerstein Ballroom in New York.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Sportsmanship at its finest: Just instants after completing 12 rounds of trying to hurt each other, Bronco McKart and Travis Simms shared a prayer. We hope McKart wasn't praying for a victory on the scorecards, though, because if he was, nobody upstairs was listening.

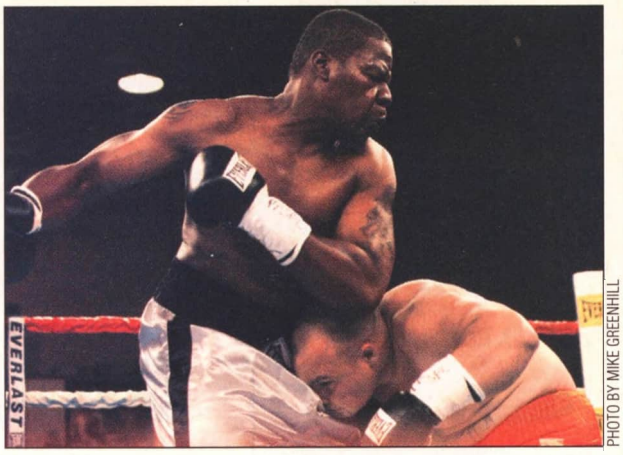


PHOTO BY MIKE GREENHILL

Heavyweight Jaspar Cooper had an all-around unpleasant pro debut in October. Not only did he suffer a first-round kayo defeat, but along the way, his opponent, Richard Stewart, committed the double infraction of headbutting below the belt. And that's a move that doesn't look like much fun for either guy.

PHOTO BY BORIS HORVAT/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

We don't care if she's a woman; when you see boxer Myriam Lamare from this vantage point, it can be pretty intimidating. French junior welterweight Lamare was photographed at a gym in Marseille while preparing for a fall fight against Eliza Olson, granddaughter of Hall of Famer Carl "Bobo" Olson.

PHOTO BY DAVE HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES

Just about every boxing fan in England right now would label Olympic silver medalist Amir Khan the sport's Most Popular Newcomer, but it was young actor Sam Aston who took home a trophy in that category at the National Television Awards at the Royal Albert Hall in London. By the way, is it just us, or does Aston look an awful lot like another popular British fighter, Ricky Hatton?

NOSTALGIA CORNER

They don't call him Romeo for nothing: Then-bantamweight champ Romeo Anaya got to spend some time with both Miss California and Miss Norway in this photo taken in April 1973. No word on whether Anaya succeeded in chalking up two knockouts in one night.

NEW FACES

DAVID RODRIGUEZ

Heavyweight

By Peter Lim

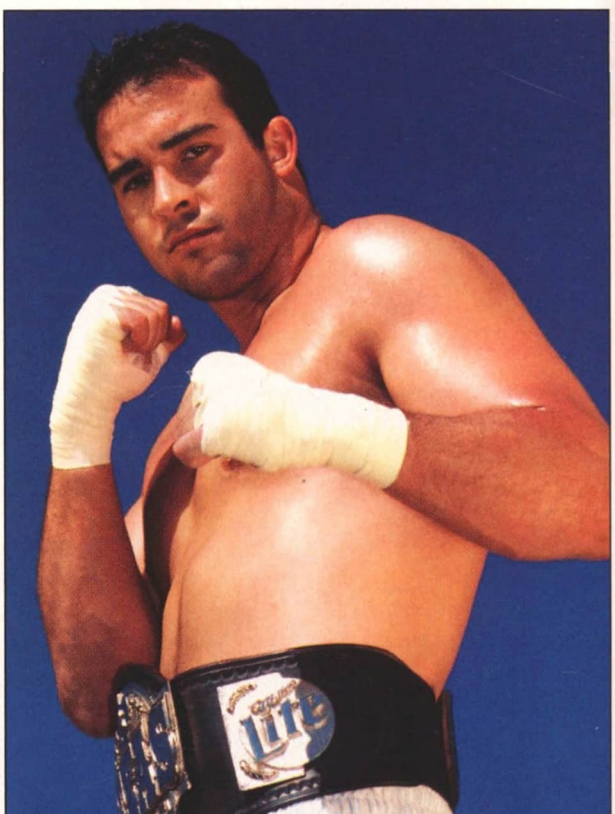


PHOTO BY ELODIA SCHUSTER

Rocky's Bar on El Paso's rough-and-tumble East Side served as David "Nino" Rodriguez' daycare center. A hyperactive kid, he was too disruptive for conventional daycare centers, so his parents dropped him off every day at the watering hole that housed a ramshackle boxing gym in its backyard. It was there that, at age five, he first became acquainted with the Sweet Science.

"Tom McKay, my very first trainer said, 'Why don't you just drop him off here, and if he wants to fight with the other kids and get into trouble, we'll let him put on gloves,'" Rodriguez said. "My dad thought it was a good idea, so he and my mom would take me there after school. I was there every day whether I liked it or not."

Rodriguez continued to work out at Rocky's as a teenager, but boxing was merely a hobby to him. He excelled in football and baseball, mainstream sports that did more to enhance his popularity and standing among his peers than boxing. And as a middle-class kid, he had more options than the average fighter for whom trading punches in the ring is one of only a handful of routes out of the ghetto. Rodriguez was even on track to go to college on a football scholarship.

It took the abrupt death 10 years ago of Rocky Galarza, one of Rodriguez' trainers and the owner of Rocky's Bar, for him to realize that boxing was his true calling. The sudden loss of his longtime friend and mentor threw Rodriguez into an introspective mode and made him take stock of his life. It was then that he decided to put college on

(Continued on page 60)

PRO RECORD

1998		
Dec. 3	James Martin, Houston, TX	KO 1
1999		
Jan. 21	David Valenzuela, Houston	KO 1
May 15	Gerald Pond, El Paso, TX	KO 1
2001		
June 2	Victor Bursey, Oklahoma City, OK	KO 1
June 10	Martin Lopez, El Paso	KO 3
2002		
Feb. 8	Clinton Whitehead, El Paso	KO 1
May 10	Arthur Trass, El Paso	KO 1
Sept. 20	Rex Jackson, El Paso	KO 1
2003		
Feb. 13	Steve Shearburn, El Paso	KO 1
April 19	Ricky Jefferson, Santa Fe, NM	KO 1
June 21	Mike Parker, Nuevo Laredo, Mexico	KO 1
Aug. 9	Gary Butler, Albuquerque, NM	KO 1
Nov. 7	Tommy Connelly, El Paso	KO 1
2004		
Feb. 27	Jason Curry, San Francisco, CA	KO 1
April 17	Jeff Lally, Las Cruces, NM	KO 1
July 9	Cruz Quintana, El Paso	KO 1
Oct. 22	Travis Fulton, El Paso	KO 1

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DRAW	KOs
17	17	0	0	17

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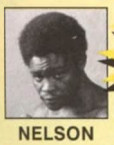
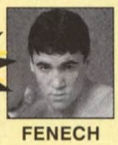


$105



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★ Kid Gavilan
★ Ken Buchanan
★ Alexis Arguello
★ Buddy McGirt
★ Pipino Cuevas
★ Nino Benvenuti
★ "Irish" Micky Ward
★ Carlos Palomino
★ Ricardo "Finito" Lopez
★ Sir Henry Cooper
★ Dwight Qawi
★ Tommy Morrison
★ Angelo Dundee
★ Johnny Tapia
★ Andrew Golota
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★ Danny "Little Red" Lopez

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MIDDLEWEIGHT DEJA VU

Is It The 1980s All Over Again?

By William Dettloff

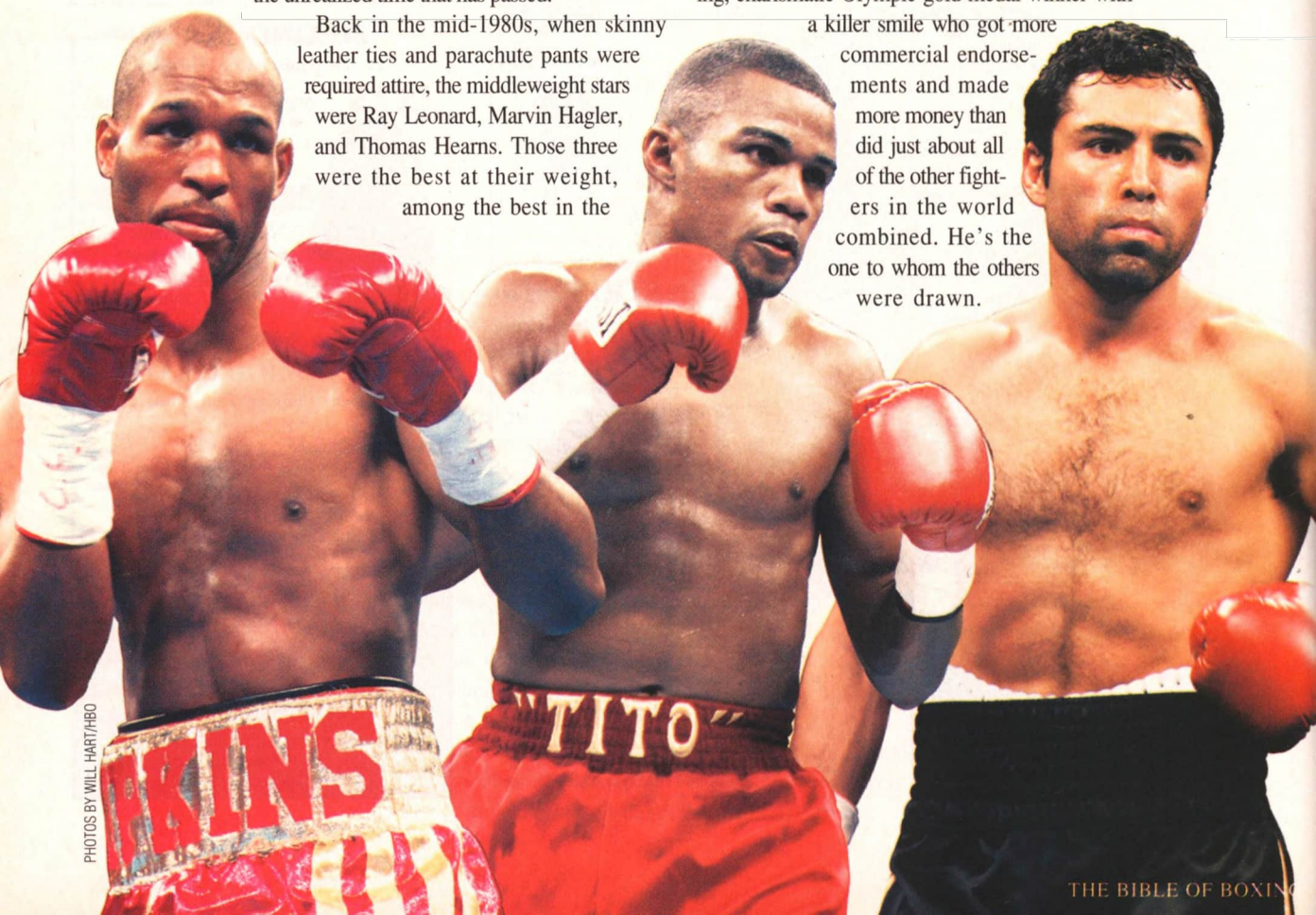
People who make their livings in fashion and pop culture and advertising like to say that everything comes back. What's passe today will be cool 20 years from now. What's cool today will be out of vogue tomorrow. Then, sooner or later, it'll come back. Some of the time it's true. Most of the time it isn't. Name the last guy you saw wearing a top hat.

In the fight game, a lot of things show up again that we thought were dead. Disgraced, near-bankrupt governing bodies, for one. Flabby, thirtysomething former heavyweight champions for another. And every once in a while, a weight class will spew out a group of elite fighters that is so reminiscent of one you used to know that you have no choice but to become vaguely uncomfortable in the face of all the unrealized time that has passed.

Back in the mid-1980s, when skinny leather ties and parachute pants were required attire, the middleweight stars were Ray Leonard, Marvin Hagler, and Thomas Hearns. Those three were the best at their weight, among the best in the business, and the biggest names there were outside the heavyweight division.

The middleweight stars today are Bernard Hopkins, Felix Trinidad, and Oscar De La Hoya. They form the elite of a division that is almost entirely barren otherwise. Like the three before them, they clearly are the biggest names in the business outside and maybe even including the heavyweight division. And the parallels they share with the middleweight stars from 20 years ago are considerable.

Consider: Then, there was a tough, seasoned, under-appreciated, school-of-hard-knocks kind of guy who got a lot of good, honest work done in the Philadelphia area. Same as now. Then, there was a tall, long-armed, heavy-handed bomber with a somewhat unreliable chin and excellent skills. Same as now. And then, there was a good-looking, charismatic Olympic gold medal winner with a killer smile who got more commercial endorsements and made more money than did just about all of the other fighters in the world combined. He's the one to whom the others were drawn.



PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

He's the one they all wanted for the money he would bring. Just like now.

The clearest parallels are between Hopkins and Hagler, who could be karmic cousins for all the career similarities they share. Both stayed, for the most part, with a single trainer or training team throughout their careers: Hagler with Goody and Pat Petronelli, Hopkins with Bouie Fisher, except for that brief period following the Carl Daniels fight. Both are from the northeast: Hopkins from Philadelphia; Hagler from Newark, New Jersey, and then Brockton, Massachusetts. Neither had an Olympic medal to flaunt upon turning pro and neither had an especially distinguished amateur career. Both were seen as taking the hard road up through the ranks, both "old school" prize fighters—though that doesn't make them equal in everyone's eyes.

"Bernard Hopkins is the only guy around today who I'd call 'old school' and he's a good fighter, but did he ever fight a Tommy Hearns? Did he ever fight a Vito Antuofermo?" asked Hall of Fame manager and trainer Lou Duva. Duva said that if he were managing a fighter and had to choose to fight either a prime Hagler or a prime Hopkins, he'd go after Hopkins. "Hagler was too strong and put too much pressure on you," Duva said. "He could punch. And he was always in great shape. He made you fight three minutes of every round. Hopkins doesn't fight like that. He's more of a boxer."

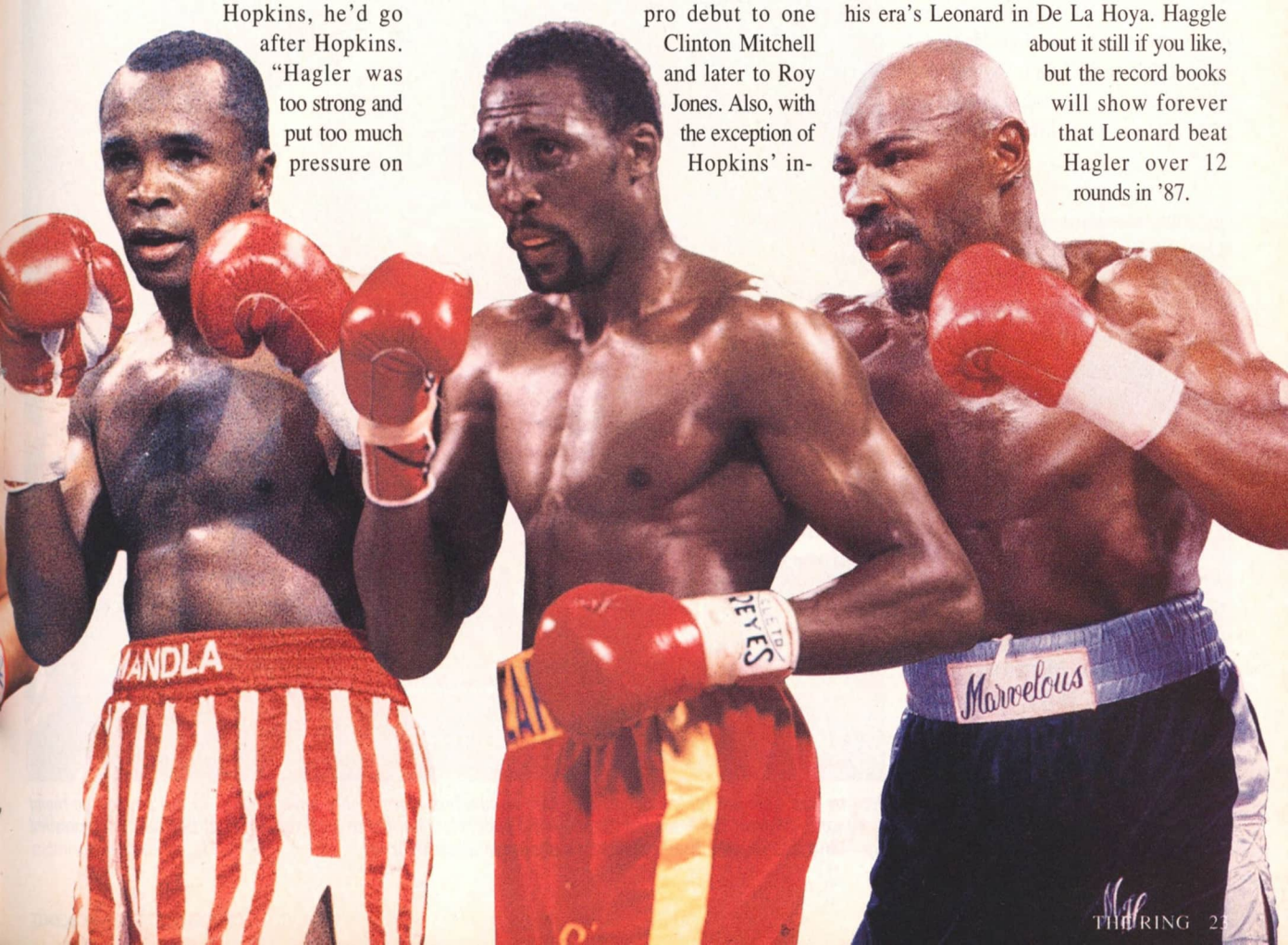
That's true of Hopkins today, but another characteristic Hagler and Hopkins share is that their respective styles morphed as they aged. Early in his career, Hopkins was more puncher than boxer. He was a little right-hand crazy if you want to be honest about it, and that right hand leveled a lot of 160-pounders. Today, at very nearly 40 years old, he's far more patient and prefers to strategize where he used to charge. He breaks guys down. Hagler, in his early days, was, when he needed to be, a slick counterpuncher who happened to be able to hit hard too. The warrior we remember taking it to Hearns and outwilling John Mugabi was an older, slower Hagler who didn't have the speed, reflexes, or legs of his youth. By about '85 or so, he relied on three things: his chin, his conditioning, and his punch.

There's more to this Hagler-Hopkins thing: Both had two early-career losses, Hagler to Bobby "Boogaloo" Watts and Willie "The Worm" Monroe, Hopkins in his pro debut to one Clinton Mitchell and later to Roy Jones. Also, with the exception of Hopkins' inauspicious pro debut, which was made at light heavyweight, both remained middleweights throughout their careers. No division-hopping here, just straight up 160-pound fighters.

There are, of course, the title reigns, but first it's interesting to note that both Hagler and Hopkins were held to draws right before they began those reigns. Vito Antuofermo drew with Hagler in their first fight, in November 1979 in Las Vegas, and Segundo Mercado held Hopkins to a draw in Equador in December '94. What's more—this is getting a little weird—both of those draws were later avenged with knockout wins: Hagler busted up Antuofermo and stopped him in five rounds in Boston in '81, and Hopkins tortured Mercado on the way to knocking him out in seven rounds in April '95.

Back to the title reigns: Hagler was a dominant undisputed champion, making 12 successful defenses over 6½ years, 11 by knockout. Hopkins, of course, also became undisputed champ, and has made 19 defenses, 12 by knockout, over his nine-year reign. He wants to make 20.

Of course, Hopkins did something that Hagler did not—at least officially: He beat his era's Leonard in De La Hoya. Haggle about it still if you like, but the record books will show forever that Leonard beat Hagler over 12 rounds in '87.



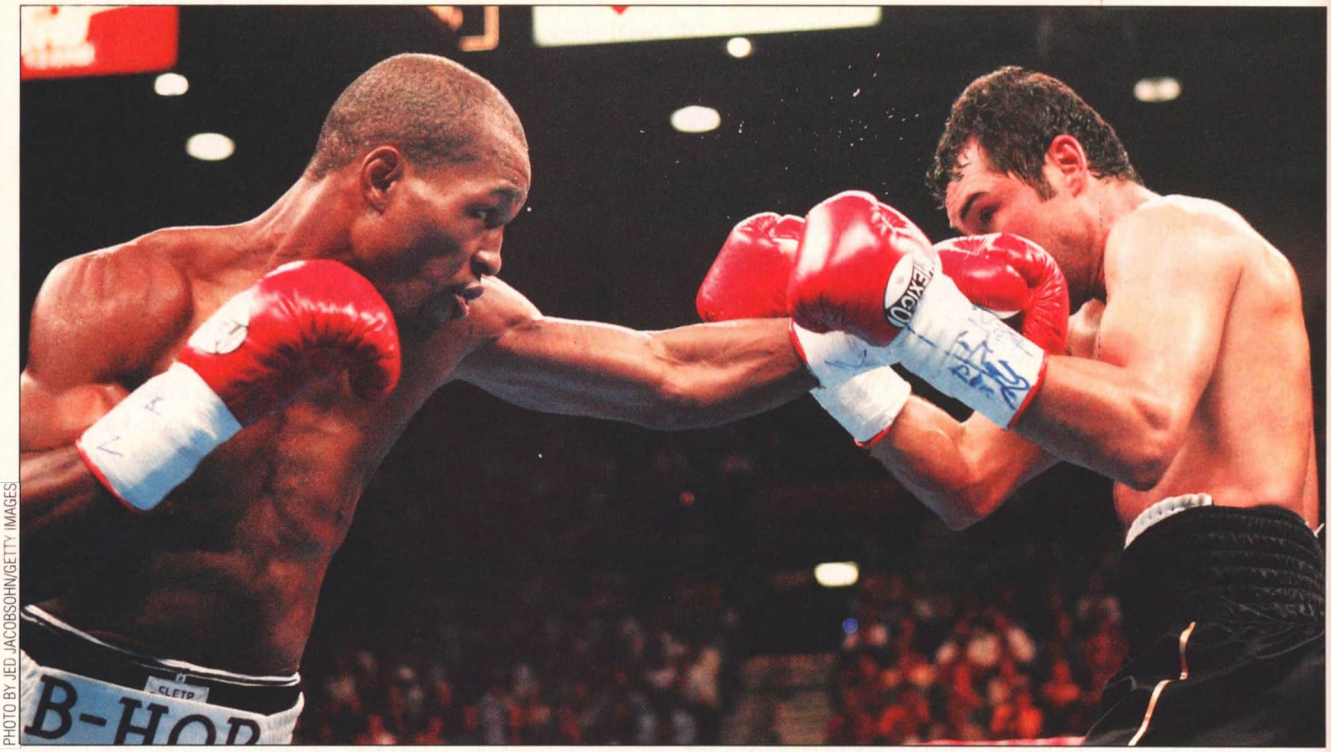


PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

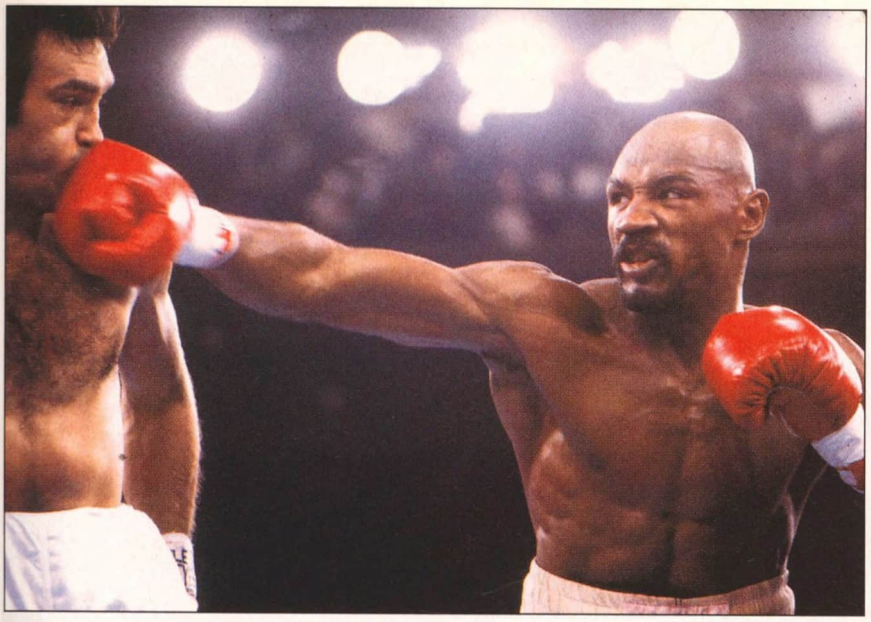
Hopkins got a leg up of sorts on Hagler by beating De La Hoya, whose 1980s counterpart, Leonard, upset Hagler via controversial decision. The ninth-round kayo of De La Hoya extended Hopkins' middleweight division record for title defenses to 19.

You can be sure that to this day Hagler wishes his fight with Leonard had gone the way Hopkins' with De La Hoya did, but that doesn't mean Hopkins was better than Hagler. It means that despite their myriad similarities outside the ring, Leonard and De La Hoya were different inside the ring.

"Leonard was just better," said longtime matchmaker and fight figure Don Elbaum. "Don't get me wrong; Oscar can fight. They both belong in the Hall of Fame. But Leonard could do it all. He could box. He could punch. He's better inside, better on the outside. De La Hoya's good, but Leonard was just better in all areas. Can you see De La Hoya beating Hearns or Hagler? Leonard was just better at about everything."

There is one key factor that may have contributed to the differences of which Elbaum speaks. For the majority of his career, Leonard employed two trainers: Janks Morton and Angelo Dundee. De La Hoya, on the other hand, has run through trainers the way Mike Tyson goes through singles at a strip club: Robert Alcazar, Jesus Rivero, Emanuel Steward, Gil Clancy, now Floyd Mayweather Sr. His style

Hearns and Leonard fought twice, and both encounters were highly entertaining. In the second go-round (pictured), in June 1989, the past-their-prime superstars battled to a 12-round draw. Leonard had prevailed by 14th-round kayo in their first bout, contested in September '81.



Hagler blasts Juan Roldan with a right hand on the way to tallying the ninth of his 12 title defenses. Hagler was, at the time, a dominant, undisputed 160-pound champion and, in the eyes of most, the number one pound-for-pound fighter in the world—just as Hopkins is now.

has changed with almost every trainer and it may be why he looks at times in the ring as though he doesn't know which style he wants to use. Not a good practice, no matter how much talent you have.

Though they may have operated on different levels, in terms of sheer accomplishment, Leonard and De La Hoya share much: Both were Olympic gold medal winners, Leonard in '76, De La Hoya in '92. Both fought stiff competition on the way up. Leonard beat Floyd Mayweather (yes, De La Hoya's trainer), Randy Shields, and Armando Muniz, among others. De La Hoya whipped Jeff Mayweather (yes, Floyd Sr.'s brother), Troy Dorsey, and Jorge Paez, among others. But regardless of the impressive way in which the lightweight De La Hoya steamrolled outgunned opponents, he lacked Leonard's grace. There was something about the way Leonard fought that made boxing less brutal. His fights seemed more a ballet than a fistfight, unusually well-suited to the playing of some classical music in the background.

If Leonard was the better fighter, it could be argued that De La Hoya accomplished as much, at least in terms of success at higher weights. The difference is that Leonard moved up in weight slowly and selectively; he dabbled at junior middle, beating Ayub Kalule for the WBA belt in '81, then dropped back down to 147 to slay Hearns for the undisputed welterweight title in their memorable duel.

He didn't fight as a junior middleweight again until '84, in the first of his seemingly hundreds of comeback bouts, stopping Kevin Howard. Three years later, he beat Hagler for the middleweight belt, and the following year stopped the terribly limited Donnie Lalonde for the WBC light heavyweight *and* vacant WBC super middleweight title. His rematch with Hearns was anti-climactic—not to mention inconclusive—as was his rubber match victory over Roberto Duran.

De La Hoya, by contrast, started as a junior lightweight, won the IBF lightweight title and the WBC super lightweight belt, defended the WBC welterweight crown seven times, won the world junior middleweight belt, and defended it once before failing against Hopkins. It's a good resume against the top fighters around, and certainly nothing of which to be ashamed. Nor is his loss to Hopkins, which represented a fight that took place 30 pounds above his original weight, measured against the 13 pounds Leonard had risen to fight Hagler.

It can be argued, too, which star, Leonard or De La Hoya, was bigger in his time. The easy answer seems Leonard; who can forget the ubiquitous 7-Up commercial that featured the ever-smiling Ray Jr., or the other commercial endorsements he enjoyed? But that was a different time for the boxing business. That was a time when even Hagler was doing commercials, so it wasn't so unusual for a fighter to be a star outside the business. That

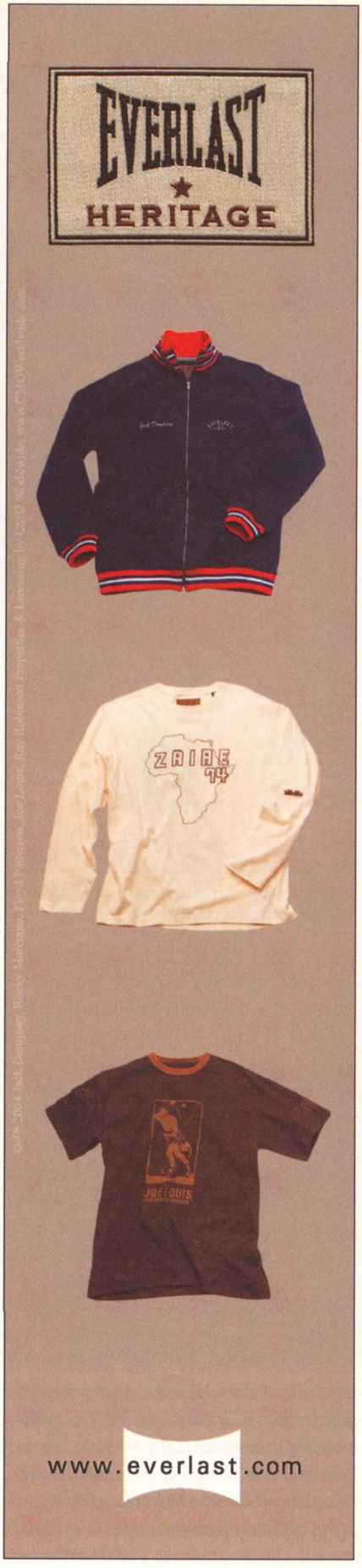


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Trinidad rattles Ricardo Mayorga with his lethal left hook in "Tito's" recent comeback bout, which resulted in an eighth-round kayo win. The question of whether Hearns packed a harder punch in his day than Trinidad does now is subject to debate.

De La Hoya in today's environment can be the draw he is suggests that his drawing power might be greater than was Leonard's when you adjust for the game's overall health. There's one huge reason for that.

"De La Hoya brings in the Hispanic population," Elbaum said. "Leonard's closed-circuit fights did very well and he was very popular, but because De La Hoya is Hispanic and brings in those fans as well as others, he could be the bigger draw."

If you subscribe to the belief, as many do, that De La Hoya deserved the decision that went to Trinidad in their September 1999 showdown, then Trinidad moves even closer to Hearns, the beloved third wheel in a triumvirate of stars. Hearns lost to Leonard and Hagler, just as Trinidad "lost" to De La Hoya and *lost* to Hopkins. Take it a little farther if you feel like stretching: Trinidad battered and stopped Ricardo Mayorga, a former welterweight champion who, at least in attitude, recalls Duran, a former welterweight (and lightweight) champion, whom, of course, Hearns battered and stopped.

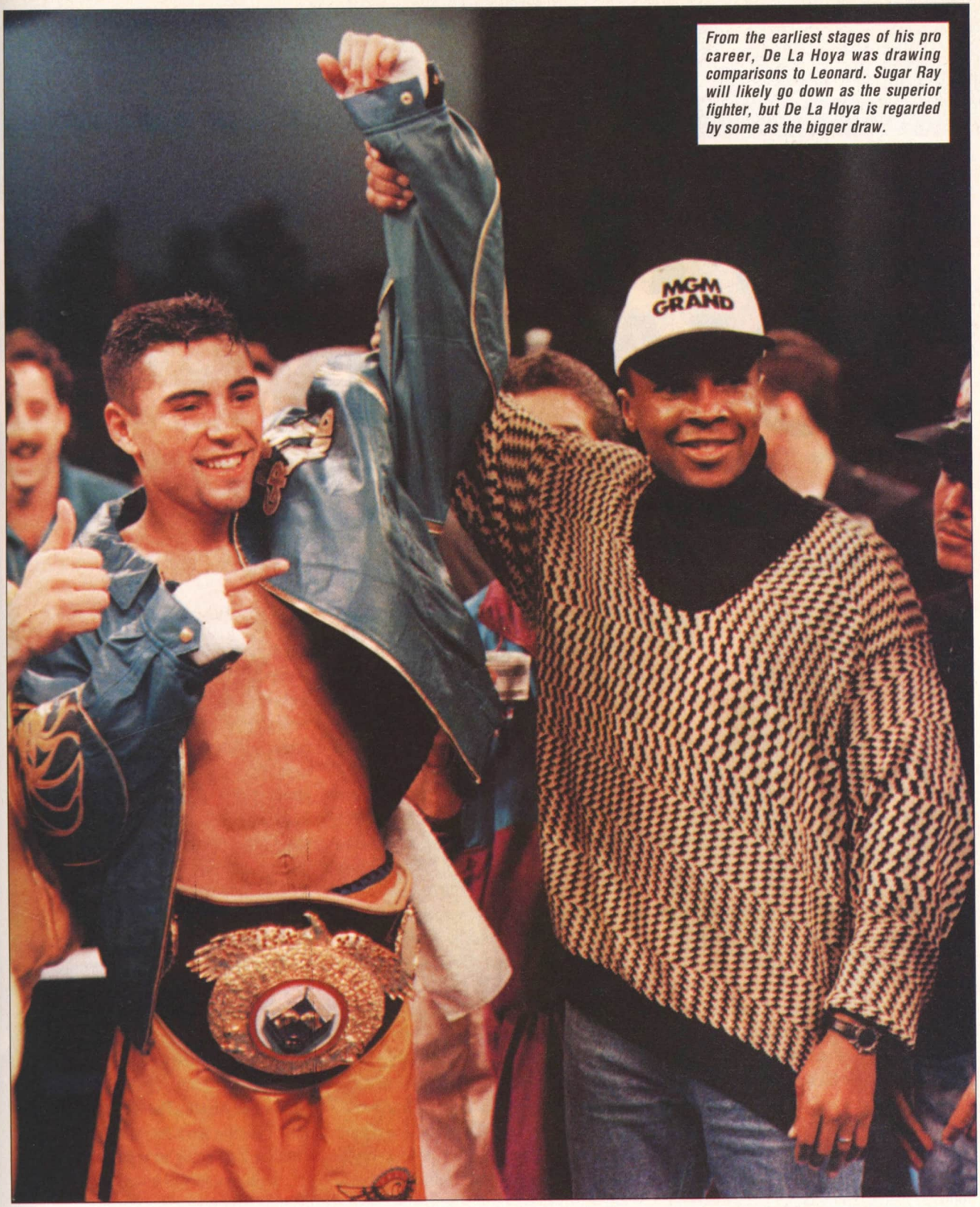
The real appeal to both of these guys, of course, is their punch. Hearns was a pulverizing puncher, especially with the right hand. Trinidad's bread and butter is the hook. The question is, which guy hit harder with a single shot?

"I think Hearns was a better puncher because of his height and reach," said veteran trainer Tommy Brooks. "He turned his punches over. Trinidad is a good technical fighter too and turns his punches over, but Hearns really got leverage against smaller guys coming into him." Indeed he did. Who can forget the way he leveled Pipino Cuevas to win the welterweight title, or the way he blasted out the great Duran without breaking a sweat? If you were shorter than Hearns—and most everyone was that he fought—and you liked to come forward, you had little chance.

Still, if Brooks had a chance to train a prime Hearns or a prime Trinidad, he'd go with Trinidad. "He's more technically sound than Hearns was," Brooks said. "He keeps his hands up. Hearns liked to drop his hands, especially the left." It's that technical superiority that probably would make Trinidad the odds-on favorite to win a mythical Hearns-Trinidad matchup.

Here's another: Trinidad has retained the power at 160 that he had at 147. Hearns did not. For all his firepower at welterweight, Hearns wasn't the same consistent, thunderous puncher after he left 147. A collection of fairly solid but unremarkable fighters—Doug DeWitt, Murray Sutherland, Ernie Singletary, Luigi Minchillo—took Hearns the full route at junior middleweight or above. Hearns was still a brilliant offensive fighter—as Trinidad is—but a more vulnerable one at higher weights than Trinidad appears to be, and a slightly less powerful one.

You could argue that Hearns was more complete than Trinidad has been—after all,



From the earliest stages of his pro career, De La Hoya was drawing comparisons to Leonard. Sugar Ray will likely go down as the superior fighter, but De La Hoya is regarded by some as the bigger draw.

when he fell behind against Leonard in their first match, Hearns got on his toes and outboxed the boxer. He also decisioned the legendary Wilfred Benitez—not with his power, but with his skills. Trinidad is a straight-ahead puncher whose limited ability to adapt was exposed and exploited brilliantly by Hopkins. And once it became clear what Hopkins was doing—stepping to the left whenever Trinidad loaded up with the hook, outjabbing him—Trinidad was lost. Same thing when De La Hoya's movement and skills froze Tito in their fight.

Whatever the case may be with regard to which fighters were better and which era was better, we may never see a trio of fighters who so closely and interestingly align to one that came before them. But who knows? It could happen. Let's just hope no one is wearing skinny leather ties and parachute pants if it does. ■

If He Never Fights Again

WHAT IS ROY JONES' LEGACY?

By Jeff Ryan

PHOTOS BY WILL HART/HBO

Often in sports, we don't get a chance to truly absorb what has just occurred on the battlefield until a significant amount of time has passed. It's safe to say that many a Boston Red Sox fan didn't fully comprehend the end of an 86-year world championship drought as he was jumping around, beer in hand, in a bar outside Fenway Park on the night his heroes vanquished the St. Louis Cardinals. No, it will finally sink in when he's shoveling away a New England snowfall one freezing afternoon in February or daydreaming as he sits and waits for his car to come down off the rack at Jiffy Lube.

It's no different, one would imagine, for a good number of boxing observers who watched Roy Jones get knocked out in back-to-back fights in 2004. After Glen Johnson flattened him in the ninth round on September 25, the overwhelming reaction was one of shock. Further analysis was almost impossible at that moment. As time goes on, though, we may come to view Jones' fall right off the cliff as one of the most incredible boxing events of the past quarter-century, ranking right alongside Roberto Duran's "No Mas," Buster Douglas' starching of Mike Tyson, "Fan Man" parachuting into the middle of a heavyweight championship bout, and anything else that left us shaking our heads in utter disbelief.

Yes, it was *that* hard to fathom. Consider that we're talking about a guy who entered his May rematch with Antonio Tarver at 49-1 (undefeated, in the minds of most, because few people considered his disqualification loss to Montell Griffin in 1997 a true blemish), had been floored just once in his career (a semi-slip against Lou Del Valle in '98), and had won versions of the middleweight, super middleweight, light heavyweight, and *heavyweight* crowns. A guy who displayed two of the fastest hands in the game's history, threw punches from *behind his back*, spent more time atop the pound-for-pound ratings than snow has atop Pike's Peak, and even inspired a journalist or two to speculate that he might be better than a deity named Sugar Ray Robinson. Yes, that Roy Jones.

Sure, we'd seen some signs that Jones was slipping or might be vulnerable against the right foe on the right night. He'd struggled to capture a majority decision over Tarver in their first meeting, in November 2003, and didn't seem quite sure if he wanted to be a light heavyweight, heavyweight, promoter, or rap artist. Nonetheless, who could have expected Jones to come apart so suddenly like the wrapping tape on a sweat-soaked glove? A one-punch kayo in the second round of the Tarver rematch was stunning enough. But to be rendered unconscious in a comeback/tuneup bout by the ordinary Johnson, a paper "champion" who had nine career defeats and had lost six of eight bouts between November '99 and January '03, was downright mind-boggling.

Since that humiliating autumn night in Memphis, Jones has delivered mixed messages about his future, but it seems likely that he hasn't thrown his last punch. "I don't feel like I have to do nothing," he has said in one breath. Then, in another, "Do I quit? Quitting isn't the right word. I'm not a quitter. I'm going to take me a little time off and my mind will tell me when it's time to come back."

Never mind that he *should* retire. Approaching his 36th birthday, with 15 years as a pro under his championship belt, two concussions in his recent past, and enough money in the bank to last him for the rest of his life (even if he doesn't become the next Don King or 50 Cent),

It's possible that this will be our final image of Jones as a fighter—leaving the ring, with a little assistance from his cornermen, after being leveled by Glen Johnson. If that's the case, what kind of legacy has Jones left?

The knockout punch from Johnson was a right to the temple as Jones, his reflexes slowed, dangled his left arm by his side and left his head exposed. The thought of an ordinary fighter like Johnson knocking out Jones would have been laughable just a year earlier.

this sure seems like the perfect time to throw himself a farewell party. For fun, let's suppose for a second that Jones actually *did* take our advice and packed it in without attempting to scale another summit, thus leaving us with our mouths agape for the third time in less than a year. If he never fought again, just what would his legacy be?

To understand that, we need to examine five key measuring sticks.

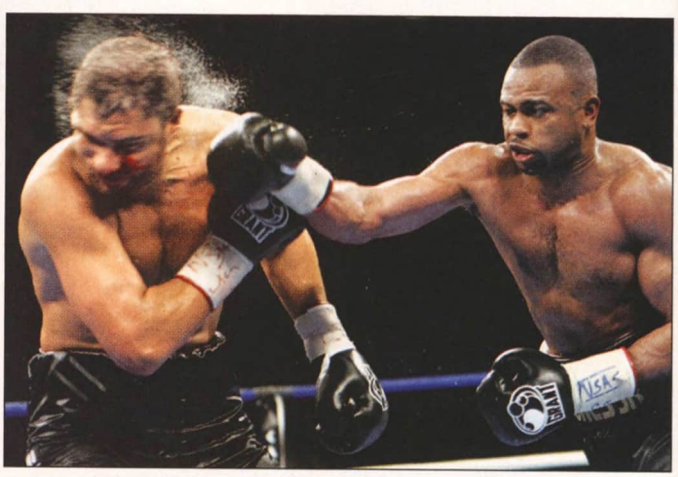
1) Record and titles: Jones' numbers are solid, and would be enough to assure enshrinement in Canastota even if nothing else was taken into consideration. A mark of 49-3 (38) is handsome, particularly when you consider that the Griffin DQ was the only imperfection on Jones' body of work for almost a 15-year stretch. Jones made 12 successful defenses in two reigns as a light heavyweight champion, five as a super middleweight king, and one as a middleweight titlist. That's 18 times retaining a championship of some sort, or about as close to a sure thing as it gets.

And although his many title belts are adorned with the logos of organizations that have greatly devalued the designation of "world champion," Jones' hardware collection isn't as tainted as those of some other multititlists, because in three of the four weight classes in which he won a version of the title, Jones was considered the division's best fighter when he ruled. (The one exception was his brief reign as WBA heavyweight beltholder, when Lennox Lewis was universally regarded as the true king of the big men.) One more achievement: In 1999, Jones unified the 175-pound title, which had been splintered for the previous 14 years.

2) Caliber of competition: Mr. Jones gets mixed reviews in this category. Sure, he just about cleaned out the light heavyweight division, but he's been frustratingly picky about whom he's faced in recent years, continually pulling out a microscope instead of a pen when it came time to select his next challenger.

The positives: Two of Jones' wins seem more impressive today than they did when his arm was raised. In '94, he dominated James Toney at 168 pounds, which we have come to learn was Toney's best fighting weight. And though his decision over Bernard Hopkins in '93 had the crowd at Washington's RFK Stadium nodding off, it is one of Jones' most significant victories because it's the only loss "The Execu-

PHOTO BY JASON ROSS LAVIN



From middleweight up to heavyweight, Jones beat quality fighters and captured titles. His victories over Bernard Hopkins (above left) and John Ruiz (above right) will rank among his most significant and will help guarantee his eventual induction in the Hall of Fame.

tioner" has suffered since 1988. Jones also gets a thumbs up for his decision over Ruiz in '03. Sure, he beat a mediocre heavyweight, but one who was younger, taller, heavier, stronger, and a harder hitter.

The negatives: Jones inexplicably ducked Dariusz Michalczewski, an opponent he would have surely beaten, and too often went the distance with fighters he outclassed: Ruiz, Del Valle, Julio Gonzalez, David Telesco. Jones also frustrated the entire industry by teasing everyone with talk of bouts against Lewis, Tyson, Corrie Sanders, or other quality heavyweights after vanquishing Ruiz. Despite all of the posturing, though, Jones' actions soon made it clear that his climb to heavyweight was a one-night experiment.

3) Intangibles: When he was once asked if he deserved to be called an all-time great considering his borderline credentials, former middleweight champion Jake LaMotta said it's the "special" things a fighter does, not just the length of his reign as champion, which sometimes define greatness. As an example, "The Bronx Bull" pointed out his handing Robinson the lone defeat in "The Sugar Man's" first 132 outings. LaMotta also mentioned rallying to save his title by knocking out Laurent Dauthille, who led on the cards, with just seconds left in their fight. For Leonard, it was making boxing's ultimate bully quit. For Tyson, it was becoming the youngest man to ever win a heavyweight crown. Those little extras look good on a resume.

Jones has had a few of those special moments as well. He knocked out Virgil Hill, who had never been stopped in his 45 previous bouts, with one right hand to the ribs. Jones once won a full three-minute round, against Vinny Paz in a '95 super middleweight title defense, *without getting hit a single time*. There was also the avenging of the Griffin DQ with a first-round knockout, and the time Jones played in a pro basketball game and won a fight on the same day.

4) How would he fare in the division's greatest era?: That would be the late-'70s and early-'80s, when the 175-pound ranks boasted a lineup of Michael Spinks, Matthew Saad Muhammad, Dwight Muhammad Qawi, Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, Victor Galindez, Yaqui Lopez, Marvin Johnson, and Mike Rossman. The bad news for Jones is that the list contains quite a few lethal bangers.

Jones' disputed decision over Antonio Tarver (pictured), kayo defeat to Tarver, and loss to Johnson were all part of the main body of his career, and that may count against him in the final analysis. And Jones' lame excuse that he couldn't get up for those opponents doesn't change anything.

Jones at his best (the '94-'98 version) would have proved too talented and versatile for Rossman, stopping him in the late rounds with a barrage of combinations on the ropes. Jones would have outboxed Qawi, Mustafa Muhammad, and Johnson to win comfortable decisions, and he would have sliced Lopez' and Galindez' eyebrows so badly that the blood bank would have been summoned by the middle rounds. Spinks and Saad Muhammad, however, would have landed right hands that left Jones staring into a penlight and counting the number of fingers being held in front of his face.

5) How did it end?: Here's where Jones' legacy is badly hurt. Sure, it's easy to say that the defeats an all-time great suffers at the end of his career don't affect history's view of him, and maybe Leonard's thrashing by Hector Camacho, Ali's sad showings against Larry Holmes and Trevor Berbick, Joe Louis' crash against Rocky Marciano, and a lot of other fumbling finishes aren't held against the vanquished. But Jones' case is different.

He didn't get beaten up after coming out of retirement or giving clear indications in previous fights that he was just a shell of the gladiator he had once been. No, Jones, despite his struggles, had beaten Tarver in their first encounter. Then, even after Tarver knocked him out in two rounds, Jones was still considered good enough to be ranked fourth, pound-for-pound, by THE RING at the time Johnson blasted him.

In other words, Jones' two knockout losses weren't separated from the main body of his career, but were actually a part of it. He was thoroughly dismantled twice at a time when he was still considered to be *Roy Jones*, not an imposter in Jones' trunks. And the historians will likely count that against him. Jones admitted that his desire had waned and he couldn't get motivated for the lesser-known opponents any longer, but that doesn't excuse someone of his stature getting knocked cold by the likes of Johnson. Great fighters may look bad when they face underdogs who can't inspire them, but they don't get stretched.

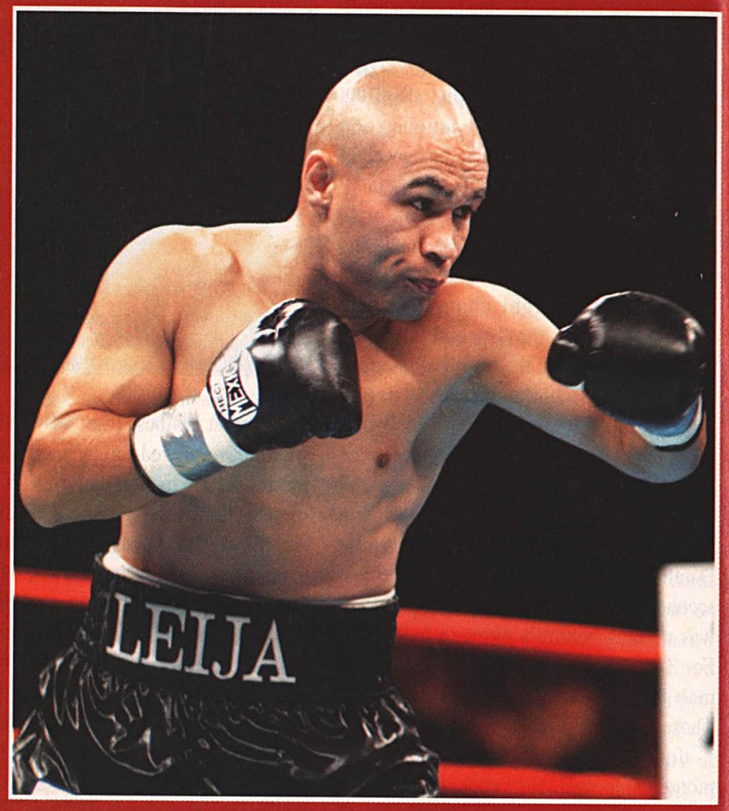
After Jones fell to Johnson, Tarver said, "I hope Roy retires. He needs to stay home and take care of himself. I want to see him enjoy his life after boxing and ride off into the sunset."

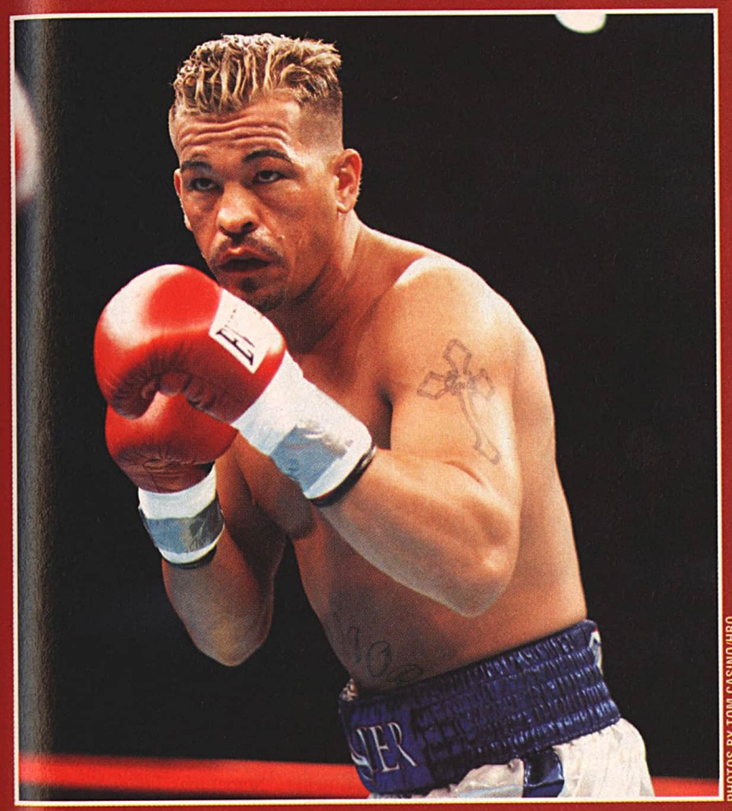
If Jones did take that ride, he'd do so knowing that, although his greatness is secure, he retired two bouts too late to convince us that he'd have found a way to have beaten Archie Moore, Bob Foster, and Billy Conn—let alone Lennox Lewis. ■

Jeff Ryan is a former managing editor of this magazine and a regular contributor.

LEIJA vs. GATTI

Can Jesse James Shoot Down The Mayweather Superfight?





PHOTOS BY TOM CASINO/HBO

By Don Stewart

During an October teleconference, Main Events matchmaker Carl Moretti was asked how Arturo Gatti might fit in with the promotional company's recently completed deal to market its fighters with ESPN and its various fiefdoms.

Gatti, one of the biggest attractions in a sport short on stars, is under contract with HBO for at least another year. He's scheduled to face veteran Jesse James Leija on the network January 29 in Atlantic City in what is expected to be a warmup for a junior welterweight megafight with Floyd Mayweather later next year. After that?

"When you have Arturo Gatti, you don't plan that far in advance," Moretti said.

No kidding. Though he's improved immensely under trainer Buddy McGirt, the injury-prone Gatti is still a tough man to predict. One certainty is that he's going to get hit. The other is that he'll keep coming back. Moretti and manager Pat Lynch have been brilliant in matching Gatti, 38-6 (29), with tough yet beatable opponents who allow him to fight his crowd-pleasing style, but that collision with the brick wall in almost every boxer's career seems so much more inevitable in the case of a gutsy throwback like Gatti.

At first glance, it would appear Leija's not that wall, that Moretti and Lynch have put together another ideal matchup. Like Micky Ward, who brought out the best in Gatti during their epic trilogy, Leija is a pressure fighter who doesn't figure to outbox Gatti. At 5'5", he's three inches shorter than Gatti. Moreover, he's a well-traveled 38-year-old whose best days came at 130 pounds.

This one figures to be fun to watch for at least a few rounds, with the hit-and-get-hit Gatti we've come to savor on display early against a foe unlikely to back down. But it should be a much easier payday for Gatti than any of the Ward fights, and his power and skills could overwhelm Leija, 47-6-2 (19) with 1 no-contest, by the middle rounds.

"I see Gatti destroying Leija and looking good doing it," said Marshall Kauffman, trainer of welterweight Kermit Cintron, another Main Events fighter. "Gatti's seasoned, he can box, he can punch, he has one of the best left hooks at 140 pounds. Leija's slow, he isn't fast. He's tailor-made for Gatti."

But McGirt isn't being disingenuous when he says he'll talk about Mayweather after the Super Bowl (Gatti-Leija is scheduled for Super Bowl eve). Minutes before working Gatti's corner during his second-round stoppage of Leo Dorin in July, McGirt was working the opposite corner against Leija in the co-feature when the former WBC super featherweight titleholder upset Main Events prospect Francisco Bojado.

Leija got up from an early knockdown and steadily battered Bojado throughout the 10-rounder en route to a split decision win. It wasn't that close. Leija's pressure was too much for Bojado, who landed frequently but couldn't hurt the rugged Texan. It was the best we've seen of Leija in the past few years, and it earned him the shot at Gatti.

"Leija, to me, is gonna be tougher than Dorin," McGirt said. "He not only has the know-how, but has everything to gain. We've gotta be extra, extra, *extra* on-point for him, more so than any other fighter. He knows all the tricks. He knows how to survive, how to get through certain situations. We have to be ready for any and everything. He has everything to gain and nothing to lose."

That's certainly not the case for the 32-year-old Gatti, who wants to secure a few big paydays before retiring comfortably. There are plenty of lucrative matchups for Gatti in the talent-laden 140-pound division, and a big-bucks pay-per-view showdown with Mayweather should be dancing in the air for Gatti to clutch or squander January 29.

We saw Oscar De La Hoya underestimate Felix Sturm back in June and nearly cost himself a multimillion-dollar fight with Bernard Hopkins. (Well, at least that was one of Oscar's excuses). No one believes Gatti is the type to overlook anyone, but that doesn't mean Leija doesn't have the potential to pull off what Sturm nearly did.

"I've known Arturo for a long time. I trained him for a few fights. He's not the type of guy to look past an opponent," Leija trainer Ronnie Shields said. "He knows he has to take one fight at a time. I'd be hoping he'd look past Leija. But he saw what Leija did to Bojado. For a guy who's 38 years old, he threw a lot of punches and outpunched the youngster. James keeps proving everybody wrong."

Before knocking off Bojado, Leija won three fights in his home state against a trio of no-namers. Before that, he was waging a competitive battle Down Under in a bid to lift the 140-pound title from Australia's Kostya Tszyu, but a broken eardrum prompted Leija's father to toss in the towel. Though Tszyu was ahead on all three cards when the fight was stopped, Leija was still in the fight.

Leija set up that title shot with a near shutout of Ivan Robinson and a technical decision against Micky Ward. Gatti lost twice to a better version of Robinson two years earlier before taking two of three from Ward. Three of those Gatti bouts were chosen as THE RING's Fight of the Year.

Gatti and Leija have been dancing circles around each other for years. In addition to Robinson and Ward, both were stopped by De La Hoya. Gabriel Ruelas outpointed

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

In his first fight following the memorable trilogy with Micky Ward, Gatti boxed and punched his way to a 12-round decision over Italian contender Gianluca Branco (pictured). It marked the first time in recent memory that Gatti escaped without suffering a serious injury.

Leija in 1994; Gatti knocked out Ruelas three years later in his first Fight of the Year. The two would-be opponents sparred back in 1991, though Lynch downplayed the significance since Leija was an unbeaten contender cruising toward his first shot at Nelson, while Gatti had just turned pro.

"The thing about Jesse Leija, the good thing about both of these guys, they've both fought the best fighters in every division they've been in," said Shields. "The only one they haven't fought is each other. We're really looking forward to the competition. Arturo is a hard worker, a great fighter. Leija is a hard worker, a great fighter. It should make for a great fight."

Of all the names on Leija's resume, Shields believes Azumah Nelson best prepared his fighter for Gatti as both share a similar warrior style. Leija went 2-1-1 against Nelson in four fights between 1993 and '98, with the loss a result of cuts. Hall of Famer Nelson had enough heart to once fight Jeff Fenech while still recovering from malaria. Still, it's not fair to compare the version Leija saw to Gatti. Nelson was just shy of his 35th birthday the first time they fought (a draw), just shy of his 40th when they met for the fourth time (a Leija rout on the cards). All four bouts were at 130 pounds.

In the second round of the Bojado fight, Leija got a timelier lesson in what not to do against Gatti when he ate a left hook that sent him to the floor. After some early success, Leija got careless and dropped his hands. If he does the same early on against Gatti, this one could end faster than the Dorin fight.

"He just got caught against Bojado," said Shields. "Sometimes James has a tendency of coming up too high. He got caught with it. You have to learn from every fight. What we're gonna do is go back and look at the Bojado fight, see the mistakes we made in that fight, see the positive things we did in the fight, put it all together, and hopefully come up with a game plan for that fight."

McGirt hadn't finalized a game plan for Leija as of late-October. Still, he predicted Shields would try to get Leija to outbox Gatti early and get the fight into the later rounds. That would be an interesting strategy for a fighter who has only three post-fourth-round kayos among his 17 career knockouts.

Both men are prone to cuts and swelling, so it's possible that one of them could build an early lead before winning on a technical decision when an accidental

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/HBO

Leija earned the fight with Gatti by beating touted prospect Francisco Bojado on the Gatti-Leonard Dorin card last July. It was the best performance the former 130-pound beltholder has produced in several years and reinvigorated his career at a point when many thought he was ready for retirement.

clash of heads forces a premature ending. And when it comes to closing cuts, Leija might have an advantage. Joe Souza, the cutman for both fighters, has been with Leija longer and will be in the Texan's corner January 29. McGirt said Gatti hadn't decided on a replacement, but neither camp expects Souza to change the outcome of the fight. If Leija somehow wins this one on cuts, though, we're sure to hear plenty about the Souza advantage.

"Both of these guys have great experience, they've had a lot of fights," Shields said. "I think it's going be who imposes their will first. It's going to be a knockdown, drag-out fight, where people are asking for another, and another."

McGirt won't go so far as to compare Gatti-Leija to any of the Gatti-Ward epics. He

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Veteran campaigner Leija stands in the way of a megafight between Gatti and "Pretty Boy" Floyd Mayweather (right). Although Gatti will be favored, Leija has upset the odds before and can't be taken for granted, especially against an unpredictable performer such as Gatti.

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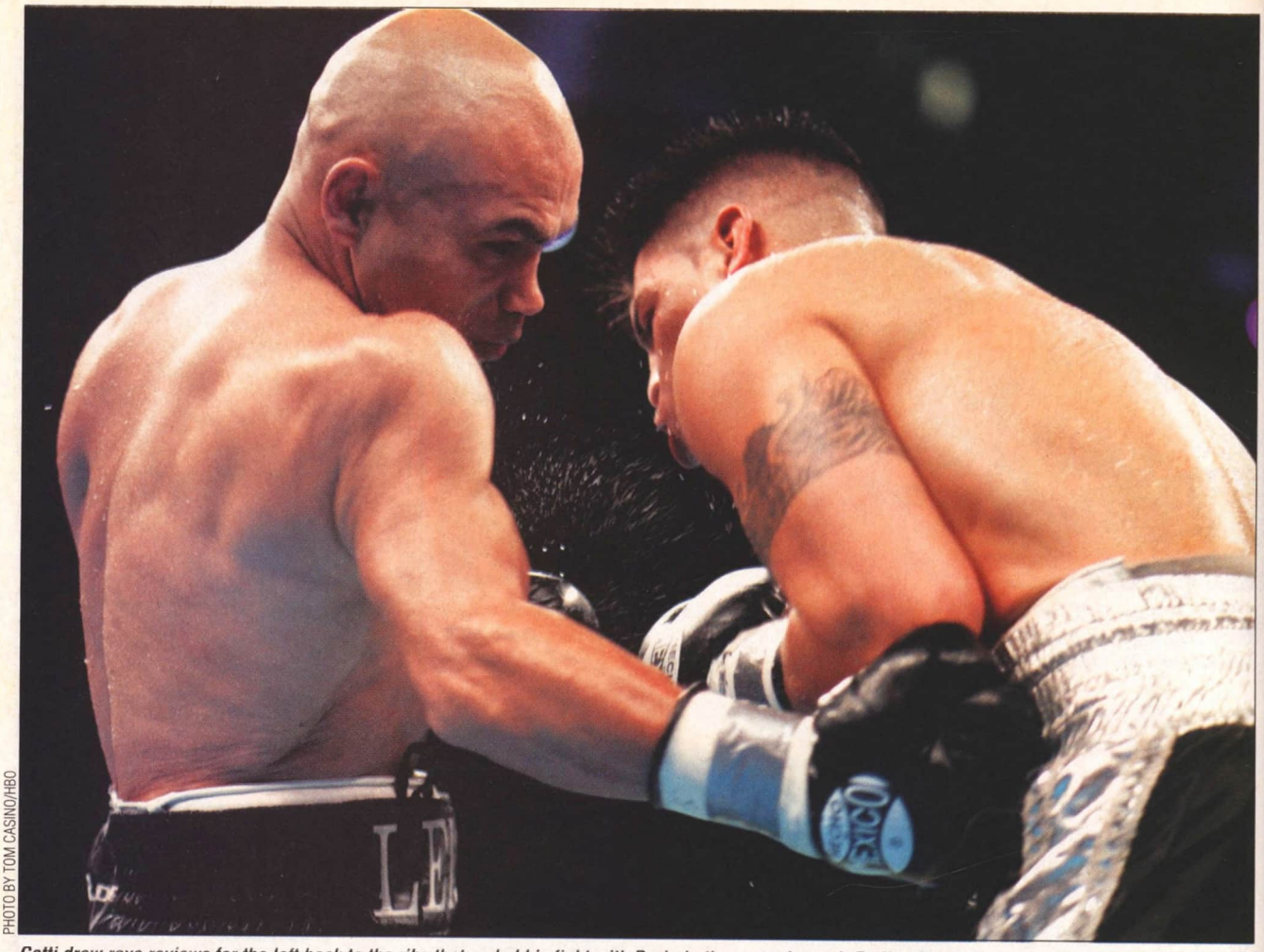

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/HBO

Gatti drew rave reviews for the left hook to the ribs that ended his fight with Dorin in the second round. Earlier that evening, Leija showed Bojado that he also knows the value of digging to the body. Gatti's trainer, Buddy McGirt, says he thinks Leija is a tougher assignment than the diminutive Romanian.

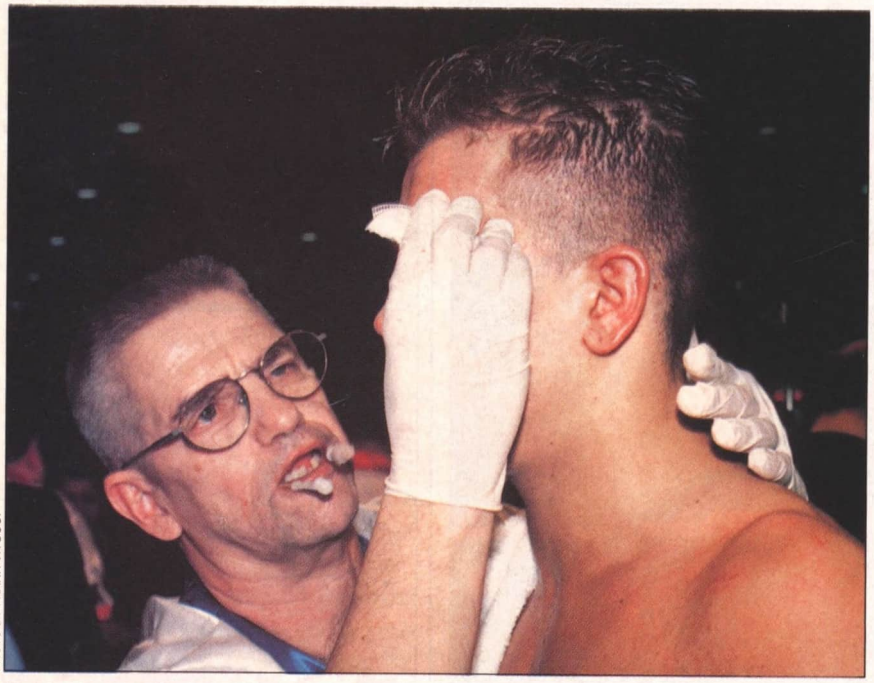

PHOTO BY FRANK VITUCCI

Ace cutman Joe Souza works on Gatti's left eye after an eighth-round TKO loss to Angel Manfredy in 1998. Ironically, Souza is also Leija's cutman, and will work the Texan's corner against Gatti as he's been with Leija longer. With a couple of bleeders like Leija and Gatti in the ring together, having a top-notch cutman is imperative.

said Ward brought more pressure than Leija and had more heart. And he believes there are plenty of weaknesses for Gatti to exploit besides Leija's questionable ability to avoid a left hook.

"There are times that I've seen Leija quit," said McGirt. "I felt he quit against De La Hoya in '95. I could be wrong, but that's what I saw, on the outside looking in. But we have to be prepared for anything and everything."

No matter what Leija brings, McGirt is confident in a Gatti victory. But Leija's tough and cagey, and where Gatti is concerned, nothing is ever certain. As Lynch has come to learn, predicting what Gatti will do in the ring is often as futile as voting for a third-party candidate.

"I take 'em one at a time," said Lynch. "I age with every fight. I hope I don't age too much with this one." ■

Don Stewart covers boxing for the Reading (Pennsylvania) Eagle and is an occasional contributor to this magazine.

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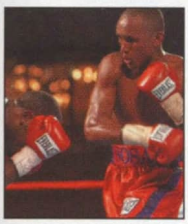


VICTORIANO SOSA

Fight Night . . . Popular boxers featured in action-packed bouts at Turning Stone Casino Resort.

MUSEUM GROUNDS

Autographs . . . George Foreman spends time signing autographs on the Museum grounds.

5K RACE, FUN RUN

Finish Line . . . "Irish" Micky Ward in stride.

Go . . . Ken Norton officially starts race of celebrity boxers and runners.

INDUCTION CEREMONY

A Moment in Time . . . Qawi, Peltz, Nelson, Zaragoza, Palomino, and Christodoulou proudly display their rings.

BOXING CARD SHOW

A Collector's Dream . . . Boxing memorabilia for fans. The world's only all-boxing show draws collectors from throughout the world.

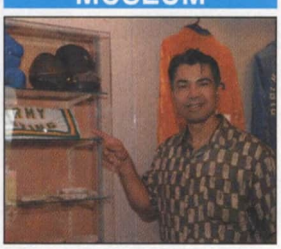
GOLF TOURNAMENT

Chip . . . Gerry Cooney (l) chips onto 18th green while Sir Henry Cooper (r) is enroute to next tee.

COCKTAIL PARTY

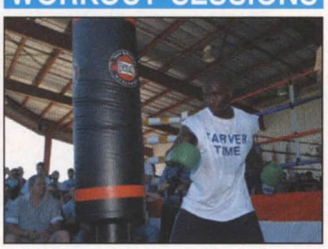
Stars . . . Boxers and fans enjoy VIP cocktail party reception.

MUSEUM



Carlos Palomino points to his boxing robe on display.

WORKOUT SESSIONS



Antonio Tarver working the heavy bag during a public workout.

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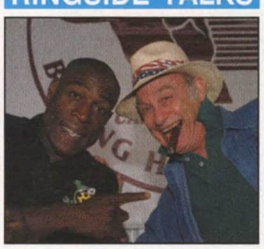

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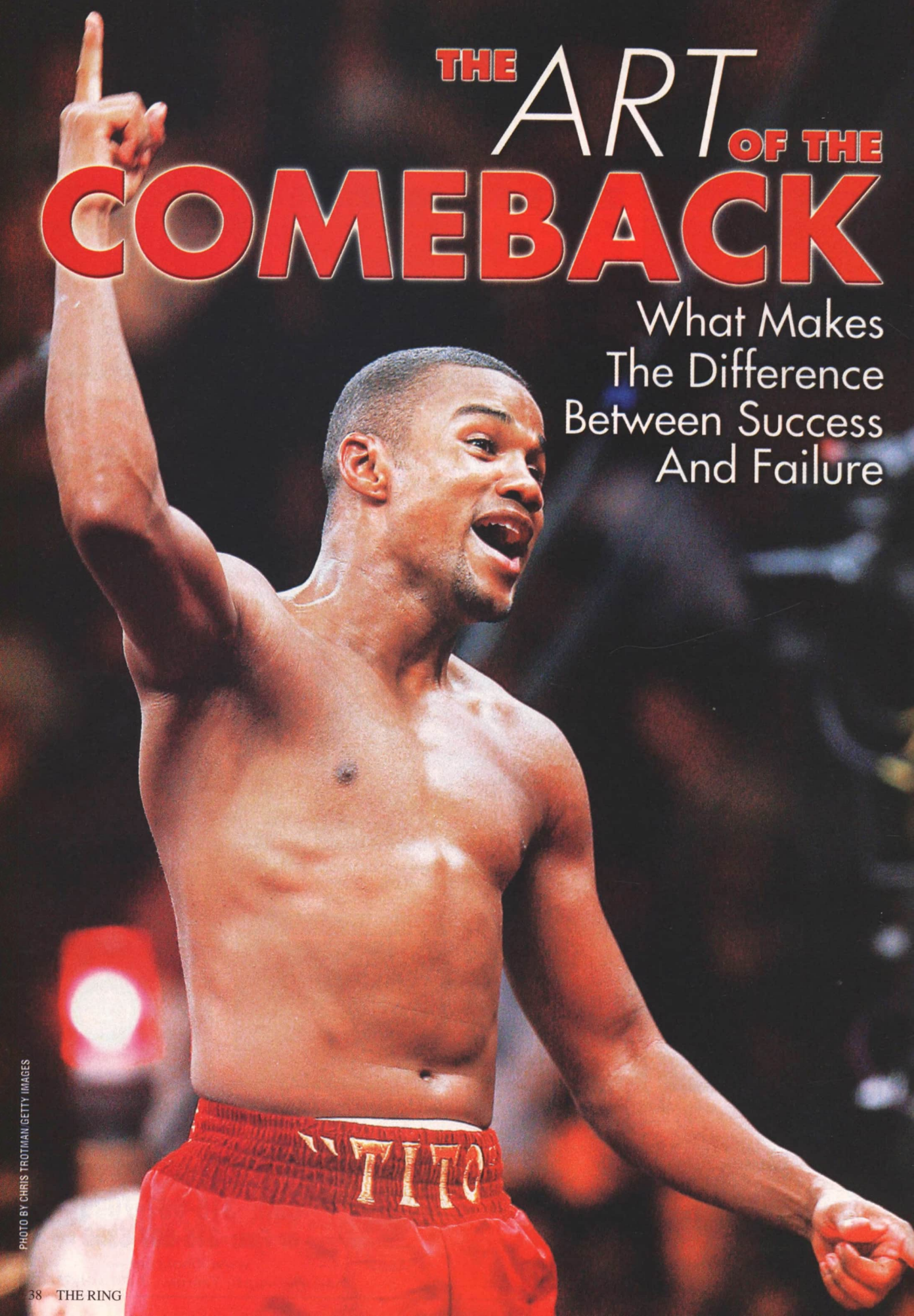


PHOTO BY CHRIS TROTMAN/GETTY IMAGES

By David Mayo

As Felix Trinidad stood tall over vanquished Ricardo Mayorga, victorious in his first fight in 29 months, he probably never considered that the importance of how he handled his absence from boxing entered into the outcome's equation. But in fact, it almost certainly did.

Twenty-nine months? Easy time. There have been ring comebacks from longer imprisonments. And we can debate this back and forth, but did Trinidad ever really leave us? During the entirety of his absence, the debate raged that Trinidad, a tender 31 as his comeback began, retired prematurely, in a delayed-jerk reaction to losing his unbeaten record to Bernard Hopkins on that memorable night in September 2001. After a victory eight months later over Hassine Cherifi, Trinidad waved goodbye to boxing, even though boxing dismissed it as see-you-later.

So Trinidad returned, predictable though it may have been. Sure, it was a hassle dropping from around 185 pounds to make the middleweight limit again, where the former welterweight, junior middleweight, and middleweight titleholder insists he will continue to campaign. But that spare tire and those chubby cheeks had not taken up long-term residence on the Trinidad frame. They barely had time to serve out a decent lease agreement before being dragged back into a Puerto Rican boxing gym, where after a few months' hard work, they were evicted.

They will return someday, when the retirement is real, and the fight in Trinidad is finished. But age, brevity of layoff, circumstances of retirement, and motivation for the task at hand dictated that October 2, 2004, in Madison Square Garden would not mark the day when the fighting will abandoned Trinidad, though it was thought that the younger Mayorga, troubled by rape allegations in his native Nicaragua, poor personal habits, and perhaps just very fortunate to catch a tailor-made opponent in Vernon Forrest, might prove a different story. Mayorga told a newspaper the day after losing to Trinidad that he also would retire. Boxing waved see-you-later in return.

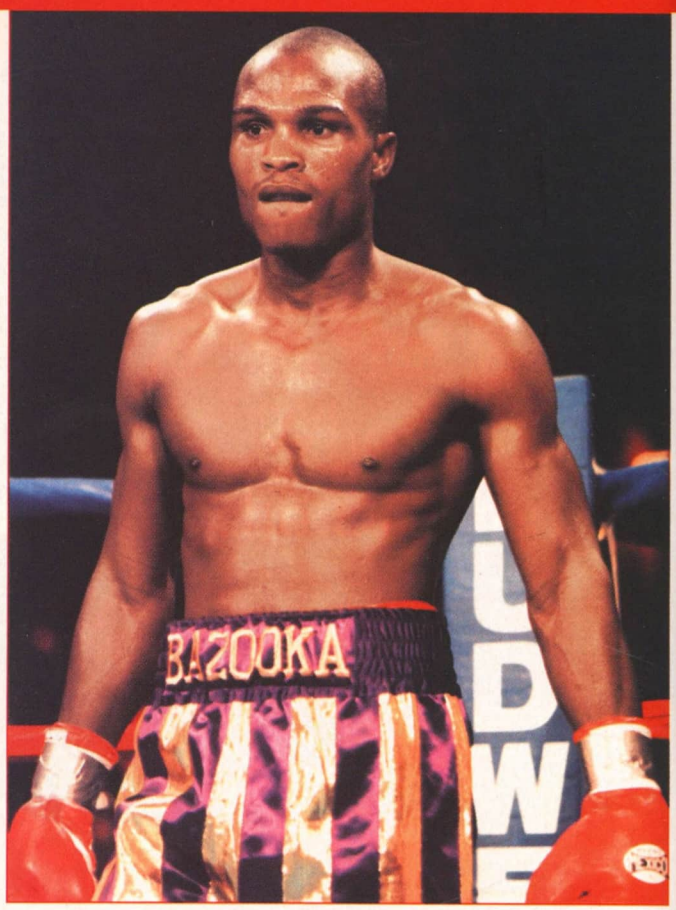
Boxing comebacks are unique compared to those in other sports, because there are no general managers to show the athlete to the nearest rocking chair. Baseball's Jim Palmer, for example, never fully embarrassed himself during his mid-life comeback because he never was allowed back on a major league diamond.

The comparatively easy return to big-time boxing is a major reason comebacks have become cliche; that, and because when Jerry Rice gets old, he merely catches fewer passes. A 10 percent reflex deterioration isn't nearly as dramatic in other sports as it is in boxing. Old ballplayers strike out. Old fighters get knocked out.

Trinidad launched his come-

PHOTO BY AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

Tito's back! Felix Trinidad (opposite page) ended his premature retirement in an intelligent manner. First, he whipped himself into top shape, and then he selected the perfect opponent in wild swinging but technically limited Ricardo Mayorga, whom the Puerto Rican icon hammered into a 10th-round knockout defeat (left).



PHOTOS BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Following prolonged layoffs, 37-year-old Riddick Bowe (left) and 35-year-old Ike Quartey (right) hit the comeback trail. Bowe has already tallied a meaningless comeback kayo, while Quartey was in training when this issue went to press.

back for the right reasons, and in the right way. He selected a popular but flawed opponent with whom he felt a self-motivating natural rivalry. He engaged in a lengthy training period to rehabilitate his blossoming belly and regain his sinewy shoulders. He didn't need the money and wasn't in legal trouble. He is beloved in his homeland and could have whiled away his remaining decades as a wealthy sports icon. Just as important, Trinidad's ring absence was hardly Foreman-esque. He attended fights and stayed close to the sport during his hiatus.

But Trinidad is not alone in his effort to resurrect a once-great career. That usually is the case in boxing, but particularly so with several recent cases.

Ike Quartey, at press time, was scheduled to end a layoff spanning nearly five years since his last fight, and more than seven since his last victory, with an early-2005 comeback.

Riddick Bowe went to the outpost of Shawnee, Oklahoma, where he ended a layoff of nearly eight years with a September victory, and said he planned to fight on similar backwater stages until bigger boxing states agreed to license him—if they ever do.

The Ruelas brothers came back. Tony Ayala came back. Mike Tyson has undergone a well-documented variety of resurfacings. Persistent doubts remain regarding Lennox Lewis' ability to stomach what his heavyweight division has become. As soon as Quartey launches his comeback, Naseem Hamed will hold the undisputed mantle of longest-rumored comeback, despite no substantiation that "The Prince" is interested in regaining any throne.

The Pick-Six of boxing comebacks—money, ego, rivalry, public pressure, regret, and boredom—are inevitably involved, individually or in some combination, in any ring return. One characteristic generally stands above the rest. Should Lewis come back, for example, ego could top the list. For Bowe, regret. For Tyson, money.

For Trinidad, rivalry, public pressure, and boredom all were involved. According to Trinidad, public pressure was the biggie, as he'd faced constant nagging about his comeback from his countrymen for more than two years. Ultimately, the fighting machine opted against rusting away in the salty island air.

But is there a formula for a successful comeback? Is there a blueprint for how a fighter must live during his absence before sloth physically dooms him? Is there a cutoff age? A better reason than others for launching a comeback, or clear reasons for not doing so?

"Coming back is a hard thing. It's hard to regain that desire," ESPN analyst Teddy Atlas said. "The best comebacks are the ones when the fighter, in his mind, never really leaves, is always thinking boxing, and is staying on top of what's happening in the sport. If you've done all that, it's easier to regain that desire, because you actually never lost it. Mentally, you never retired."

Buddy McGirt, one of boxing's hottest trainers, understands the incredible allure of the sport. It made him wealthy, then its trappings made him poor. McGirt remembers sitting on his porch one day in 1990, two years after losing the junior welter-

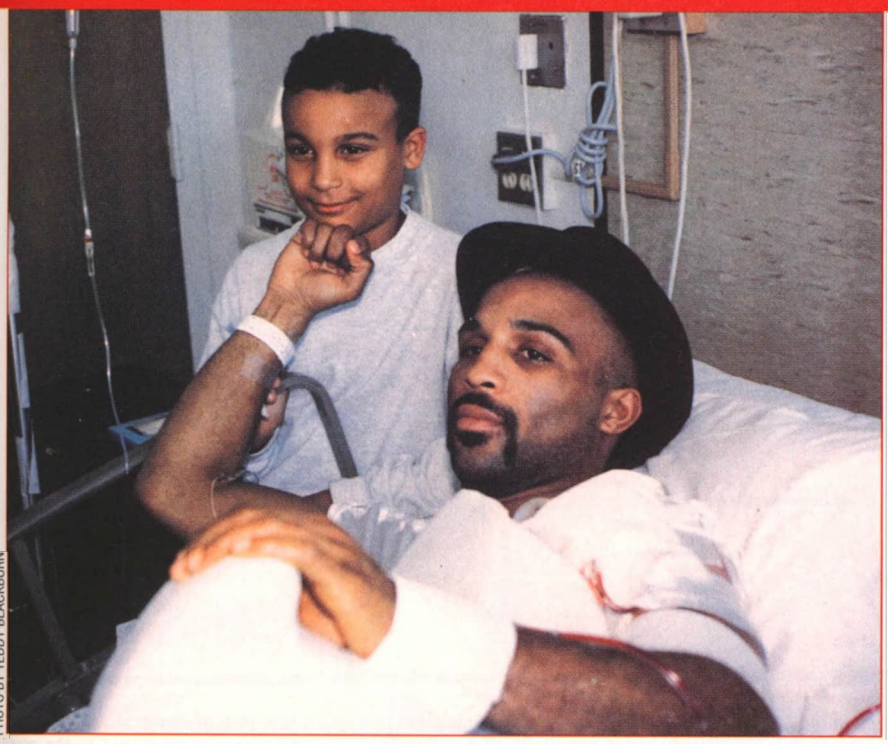


PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

Buddy McGirt is pictured in the hospital in 1993 playfully taking a poke at his son, James Jr. (now a pro), while recovering from surgical repairs to his left shoulder. McGirt made several comebacks, but finally called it quits and became one of boxing's top trainers.

weight title to Meldrick Taylor, his arm in a cast, facing six months' inactivity after suffering a torn biceps in a win over Jose Bermudez. McGirt spied seven cars in front of his home. He was making payments on all of them. He had $10,000 in the bank.

McGirt got his financial house in order by winning the WBC welterweight title the following year from Simon Brown. He reigned for two years, earned big paydays for two losses to Pernell Whitaker, and kept fighting even after a shoulder injury dogged the final years of his career. Then, one cold day in February '97, McGirt was in the middle of his morning roadwork when he abruptly stopped. He retired on the spot, at age 33, after 15 years as a professional boxer.

"A true fighter never loses the urge," McGirt said. "I understand completely why all these comebacks happen. To me, the dilemma of having to quit, rather than wanting to quit, is the hardest thing in the world, especially if you really love the game. I dealt with my brother's death and my father's death easier than I dealt with my retirement from boxing, because I loved it so much."

Comebacks in boxing are as old as the sport. The reasons seldom vary much. And in virtually every case, a prime-aged opponent, anxious to add a famous old champion to his victim ledger, awaits.

Jim Jeffries' comeback after a six-year layoff to fight Jack Johnson for the heavyweight championship in 1910 was driven by public opinion, with white America against Johnson and unified in the notion that Jeffries, who had retired undefeated, was best-suited to regain the title. Jeffries lost more than 100 pounds, but the years of physical indifference took an enormous toll. Johnson stopped him in the 15th round.

Benny Leonard made his final lightweight defense in 1924. He returned as a welterweight in 1931 after losing a fortune in the stock market crash. Leonard averaged two fights a month without losing, until he fought Jimmy McLarnin 366 days into his comeback. McLarnin hammered Leonard in a sixth-round stoppage, seven months before winning the welterweight title with a first-round blitz of Young Corbett.

There always is an Ezzard Charles or Rocky Marciano there waiting for Joe Louis, or a Terry Norris for Ray Leonard, or a Larry Holmes for Muhammad Ali, when a fighter comes back too late.

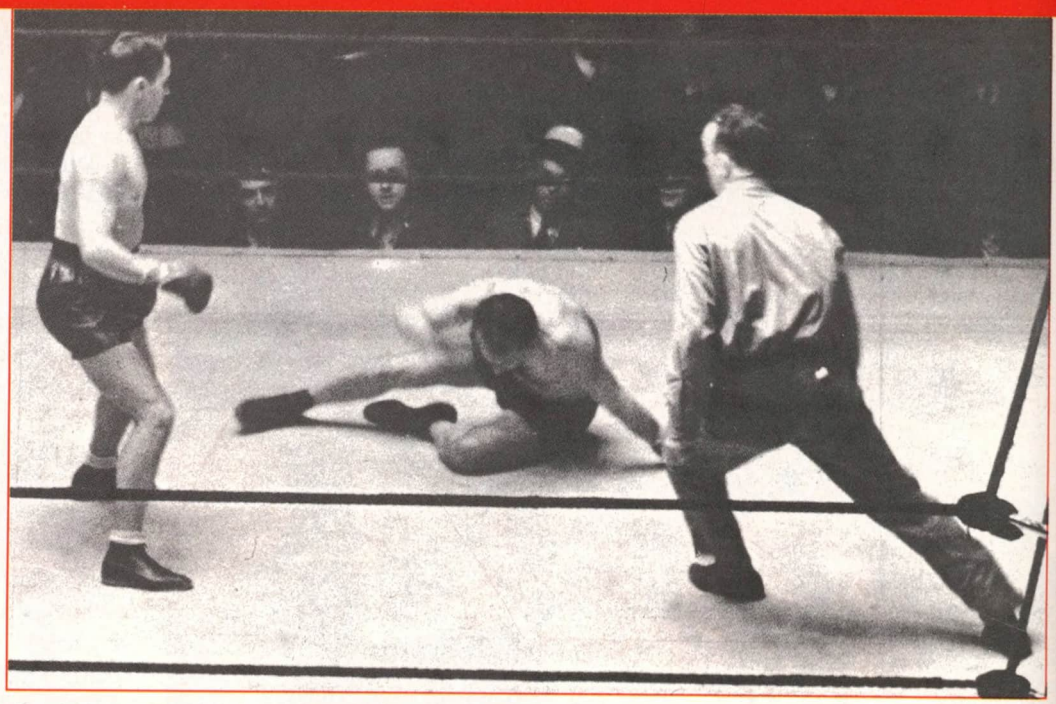
Those images of beaten champions are what made the boxing comeback cliche in the first place. So what does the successful comeback formula entail? Using Ray

Former heavyweight champ Jim Jeffries came out of retirement and shed 100 pounds of surplus suet to try to regain the heavyweight title from Jack Johnson in 1910. But the comeback was a failure, and Jeffries took a one-sided beating from Johnson before the fight was stopped in the 15th round.

Leonard as the template for all, comebacks good and bad, the short list includes:

•If you've been off three years or more, don't try it. Ray Leonard was off 35 months before his successful comeback against Marvin Hagler, which also included the period when Leonard was pursuing the fight and beginning an extended training period. But Leonard had been off six years before his body broke down on him during a fifth-round loss to Hector Camacho in 1997.

•Don't come back unless you need it to feel whole. Leonard demonstrated little of his panache in a 1984 comeback fight against Kevin Howard, when he came back from a flash knockdown to score a lackluster stoppage. Leonard was so disgusted, he did not fight again until Hagler.



After losing a fortune in the stock market crash, former lightweight champion and future Hall of Famer Benny Leonard, who'd been retired for seven years, launched a comeback that ended badly when he was knocked out in the sixth round by future welterweight champion Jimmy McLarnin in 1932 (pictured).

•If you come back in your mid-30s, a series of non-title tuneups is a must. For fighters used to fame and glory, the pride gulping of that sort of grinding comeback can prove too much. Ray Leonard was 30 when he fought the 32-year-old Hagler in an immediate comeback bout, and 40 when he fought 34-year-old Camacho in another comeback, to distinctly different results. Leonard was 32 when he knocked off 19 months of ring rust with a win over Don Lalonde. But by age 34, he could not do the same after a more modest 14-month layoff before fighting Norris.

Ray Robinson, on the other hand, returned from a 2½-year layoff in 1955, at age 34. But Robinson returned in the same division he ruled previously, and fought six times before regaining the middleweight title against Carl "Bobo" Olson. After mixing it up the next couple of years with Olson, Gene Fullmer, and Carmen Basilio, Robinson retired again as middleweight champion. He tried another comeback at 38, after a 21-month layoff, but never regained the title.

•Don't come back more than one weight division removed from your most recent championship weight. Benny Leonard, applying today's weight guidelines, tried and failed. But so did Ray Leonard, in a different fashion. He moved down two divisions, from super middleweight to junior middleweight, in losing to Norris.

Other than George Foreman, the man whose comeback defies all conclusions about comebacks, anyone who disobeys those rules usually suffers a failed comeback, regardless of the pedigree of the fighter.

Joe Louis was 36 when he ended a 27-

PHOTO BY PAT ORR

Ray Leonard made several successful comebacks, but pushed his luck and aging body too far when he tangled with Hector Camacho in 1997. "The Macho Man" stopped the 40-year-old Leonard in the fifth round, sending Sugar Ray into permanent retirement.

Not even Joe Louis could beat the comeback bugaboo. "The Brown Bomber," pictured signing a contract for his 1950 bout with new champ Ezzard Charles while New York boxing commissioner Eddie Eagan looks on, had been out of action for more than two years and was easily outpointed.

month layoff with an immediate title fight against Charles, resulting in his first loss in 14 years. Ali was 38 when he ended a 25-month layoff with an immediate title fight against Holmes, resulting in a frightful beating and the only stoppage loss of his career. Ali took off another 14 months before losing his career finale at 39 to Trevor Berbick.

Applying those comeback theories, Trinidad should be all right. He returned at the same weight as his last title, at an acceptable age, and against an opponent, Mayorga, whose reputation was built on two wins against the same man and who was fighting two divisions heavier than his championship weight.

Bowe, 37, and Quartey, 35, probably are headed for ill-fated comebacks due solely to the sheer length of their layoffs. If so, they will be far from alone.

Jake LaMotta tried a comeback at 32, after 15 months off, but the accumulation of ring wars and complete lack of desire were too much to overcome. LaMotta fought three times, lost the last one, and retired for good.

Willie Pep came back from a six-year layoff at 43, and went 9-0 against third-class opposition before losing a six-round decision in his last fight.

McGirt once found himself together with the latter two Hall of Famers, who already were deep into senior-citizen status. The conversation that evolved confirmed what McGirt always believed about the fighting spirit.

"One time, I was in a room with Jake LaMotta, Joey Giardello, and Willie Pep," McGirt recalled. "I asked Jake LaMotta how he would've done with Joey Maxim, and he said, 'I would've licked him.' Joey Giardello told Jake, 'He would've punched you silly; what do you mean?' Then Willie Pep said, 'Jake, you couldn't even hit him in the ass; he would've slapped you for 15 rounds.' And they got in this big argument, and I just sat back, laughing, all because I asked one question.

"I thought they were going to all have comebacks, right then and there. But that's how boxing is. The only thing harder than getting in it is getting out of it." ■

David Mayo covers boxing for the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Press and is a regular contributor to this magazine.

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The RING Update

FORMER MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION TERRY DOWNES

By Tris Dixon

Former middleweight champion Terry Downes welcomed the visitor into his plush West London home with a firm handshake and an offer of a drink. Still charismatic at age 68, he walks with a stick and smokes a pipe.

In Downes' front room, the only things that give away his past are three photographs, side-by-side in a single frame, of Bob Fitzsimmons, Randy Turpin, and himself, and two belts, THE RING belt he won by defeating Paul Pender in 1961 and his treasured Lonsdale belt, emblematic of the British championship. Downes followed in the footsteps of Hall of Famers Fitzsimmons and Turpin to become Britain's third 160-pound champion. Furthermore, he did it at a time when there was an enormous array of talent in the division.

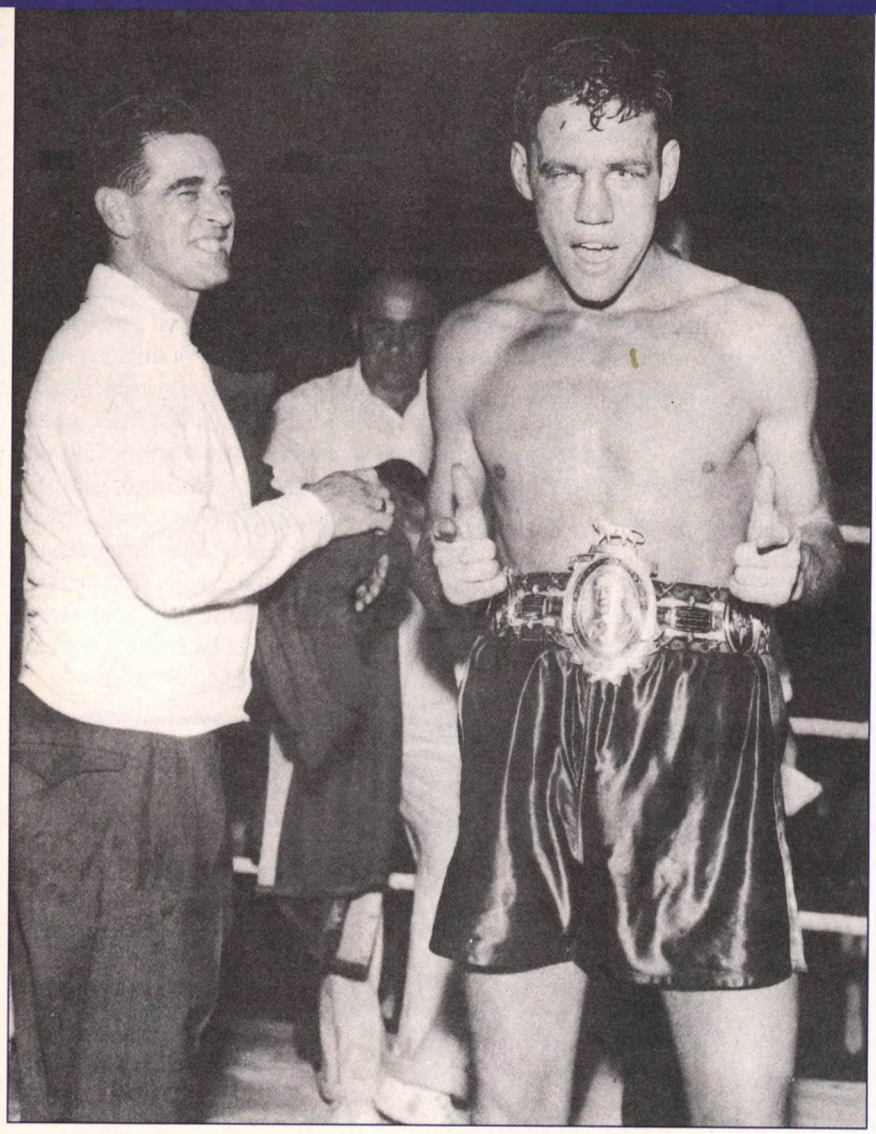
Recently, his wife of 46 years, Barbara, had been critically ill on a life-support machine. Thankfully, she has pulled through and was resting while Downes and his visitor talked downstairs. But overall, life after boxing has treated Downes very well.

"I've had ups and downs, but I can't complain," said Downes. "Financially, I made nothing out of fighting. I think my total purses came to about £108,000 (factoring in inflation, that would be roughly the same as earning $1.2-million today). But after training expenses, managers, trainers, maybe I was left with £50,000 over seven years. Then I got married, got four kids, and they all went to private school. I made my money outside of boxing. I had a nightclub in London and some betting shops. The betting shops did well, not because they were Terry Downes' betting shops, but because it was there and people liked to gamble."

"How Can I Not Love Boxing?"

Then and now: Nat Fleischer, editor and founder of THE RING, presents Downes with the middleweight championship belt he won by defeating Paul Pender in 1961. Forty-three years later, Downes poses with the belt in the garden of his home in West London.

PHOTO BY TRIS DIXON



Downes and trainer Tom Ryder celebrate Terry's 12th-round TKO over Phil Edwards to retain the British 160-pound title in July 1960. Downes was approaching his peak at the time, and would beat future world champion Joey Giardello in his next bout.

Downes opened the first shops with a cousin, and once a couple of the shops started making money, they opened another couple with the proceeds. Soon it became a mini-empire.

"They were all making money," said Downes with a smile. "Then we got taken over, and in the end William Hill (a large chain of U.K. bookmakers) bought us out. But I ran the nightclub for another eight or 10 years."

Many fighters struggle once the crowds stop cheering. Last year, for instance, it was well documented that Frank Bruno struggled to come to terms with life as a retired fighter. Downes can empathize.

"I understand why fighters make comebacks," he mused, thinking it over as he toyed with his pipe and lifted his foot onto the coffee table. "The temptation was always there, but I had done a couple of films and a couple of plays, and I had a family and business interests."

Was it tough to walk away from the spotlight?

"It was and it wasn't a difficult decision to call it a day," he said. "I think my last fight was probably my best fight, and if I couldn't beat Willie Pastrano that night, I don't think that I ever would have beaten him. I couldn't fight that good again. I only made £3,000 for that fight, and would have made even less if I went over there (the U.S.) and fought him in a rematch.

"Now, life treats me the same way I treat life. It wakes you up in the morning, and I do what I want with life, which is absolutely nothing, and it does nothing to me. It's just worked out, as I wanted it to. I've got a nice house, nice kids. I've got a couple of quid in the bank, no business worries, nobody telling me to do this or do that. It's perfect."

But when Downes first laced on a pair of boxing gloves as a schoolboy there was no telling where it would lead him. He won school tournaments and area championships, but when he was 13 his progress was hampered by a weird coincidence. Downes had qualified to box in the semifinals of an event in London, and keen to outdo his opponent, he read a boxing textbook.

"I read this boxing book to pick up a few pointers," he recalled. "It had pictures of how to box and it showed two boys boxing. And this bloke I was fighting, Ron Hillier, was one of the guys in the book showing me how to fight! I thought, *Bloody hell, how I am I supposed to beat him? He's telling me how to fight*. But I had to fight him."

Hillier beat Downes and went on to win the tournament, but Downes took the loss philosophically, saying, "Fighting good fighters just made me all the better."

When Downes was a teenager, he and his family temporarily moved to the United States to be close to and support his sister, Sylvie, who was performing in a circus. During this time, Terry boxed for the YMCA, and following a YMCA vs. Marine Corps tournament, a Marine Corps major invited him to try out for the Marine boxing team. Aware that life on the Marine boxing squad provided preferential treatment and six weeks advance pay, the 16-year-old Downes volunteered, eventually fighting in the Olympic trials.

"I beat the bloke the U.S. sent in 1956, the welterweight, I beat him in the All-Services finals. I was all right to be in the bloody Marine Corps catching bullets on the front line, but with boxing gloves they said, 'Oh no, you can't represent us.' That was one of the reasons I never went back there."

After a six-year stint in the Marines, Downes returned to England and turned pro in April 1957. In just his third pro bout, he took a fight that his manager, Sam Burns, said "would be an easy night's work." But future two-division world champion and eventual Hall of Famer Dick Tiger wasn't easy for anybody, as Downes soon found out.

"Tiger had lost a few, but he was finding his feet now and he had stopped a few blokes," said Downes. "My first fight was a

PHOTO BY TRIS DIXON

The biggest night of Downes' career came on July 11, 1961, when he stopped Pender on cuts (top). That's ref Ike Powell stepping between Downes and Pender after the defending titleholder slipped in the sixth. A poster from that fight now hangs in Downes' house (above).

six-rounder, my second fight was an eight-rounder, and my third fight was Dick Tiger for eight rounds. The six-round fight lasted one round. They didn't even know I could go three rounds. The next fight was eight rounds, and I stopped him in three rounds. The fight after that was Dick Tiger. *Boom, Boom!* [In the first round] Tiger hit me and I was on the floor. I had never been on the floor in my life, and I'd had hundreds of amateur fights. I got up a bit dizzy and he put me down again. I thought, *Bloody hell, this is getting monotonous isn't it!*

"It was a good fight after the bad first round. I got up and gave him a good fight, but he stopped me on a cut in the end. But I fought again three weeks later.

"In fact, every time I got a cut, three or four weeks later they had me fighting again. If you have a protege and you want

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Downes, along with his wife, Barbara, and daughter, Wendy, aboard the ocean liner Queen Elizabeth en route to Boston for his third fight with Pender, who regained the title via 15-round unanimous decision on April 7, 1962, at Boston Garden.

something out of him, you've got to look after him. You make sure the cut is all right. You leave it two months, 10 weeks, and then ask, 'How's your cut?' Cuts don't heal in three weeks. Look at my record, every time I got stopped, I was fighting four or five weeks later."

Downes' career would get no easier. After stopping Phil Edwards in September '58 to win the vacant British middleweight title, American Spider Webb was brought over to England, where he TKO'd Downes in eight rounds.

"Spider Webb was the most underrated of all of them," said Downes. "He was a good fighter, and they threw me in much too early. He was about the best middleweight around at the time, no one wanted to fight him."

It was against another top American, Joey Giardello, in October '60, that Downes produced arguably his best performance.

"I had to box Giardello because I knew how rough and tough he was. You didn't want to go swinging and winging with him because he was a right tough bastard. That was his game. I boxed him and it paid off. It was a relatively easy fight. I came out unscathed; for once I wasn't cut. I don't think he could get over the fact that I could box him."

But even his 10-round decision over Giardello didn't bring Downes the respect he deserved at home.

"Well, Giardello's washed up. It's not that Downes had done any good," were the comments he heard.

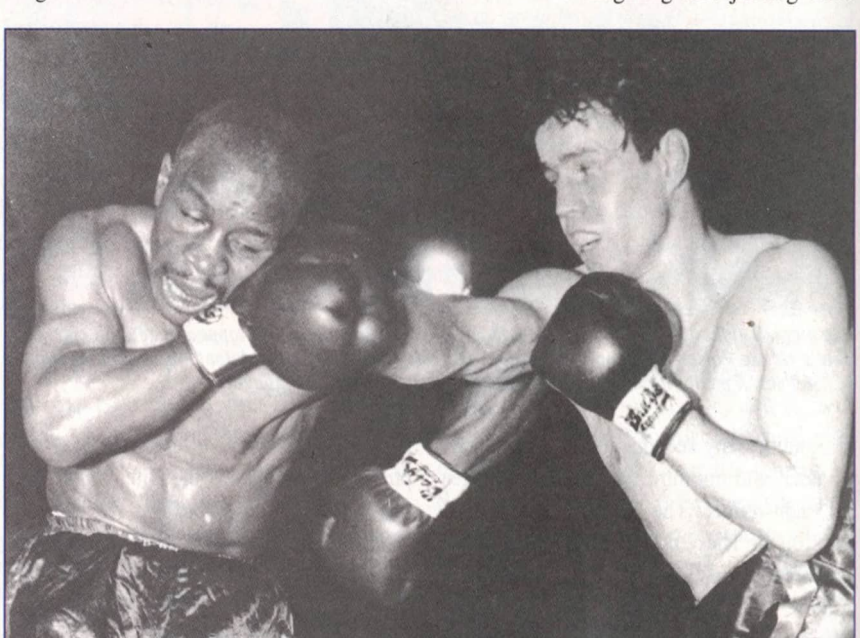
"Two years later Giardello outpointed Dick Tiger and won the world title," said Downes. "Two fights before I beat him, he fought a 15-round draw with Gene Fullmer. You look at his record after he fought me and try telling me he was washed up."

As proud as he was in defeating the tough Brooklyn-born Philadelphian, Downes was sad to reflect that he beat the shell of Sugar Ray Robinson in 1962.

"He was just an old man when I fought him," said Downes, shaking his head. "It's just amazing to look at his record. At his best it must have been incredible to watch him fight. If I had to fight him when he was in his prime, I would have run as far as I could go. It wouldn't have been a match. No one would have been stupid enough to make it. It's an embarrassment to have his name on my record. It's not a privilege to beat up an old man."

The Robinson fight came after Downes had lost, won, and lost in a trio of middleweight title fights with Pender. The decision over the 42-year-old Sugar Ray was the second of a seven-bout winning streak that took Downes to a crack at the light heavyweight title, held at the time by Pastrano. After being stopped in 11 rounds on November 30, 1964, Downes retired with an overall record of 35-9 (28).

In his study are some of Downes' old trophies, a vast range of boxing books, and some framed pictures from his career. There are also a few copies of his autobiography, *My Bleeding Business*, stacked neatly in a corner. One of the photos is a shot of him laughing and joking with



Downes nails American Jimmy Beecham with a right hand during a 1963 bout in London that resulted in a ninth-round TKO victory for the Englishman. Four fights later, Downes retired after failing to take the light heavyweight title away from Willie Pastrano.

Actress Sharon Tate puts the bite on Downes in a scene from the 1966 movie, **Vampire Killers.** *Downes appeared in several films and plays, but eventually made a small fortune in a chain of betting shops he opened with his ring earnings.*

Muhammad Ali, another of him swapping blows with Robinson. He looked at the pictures and gazed longingly at a fight poster advertising his first encounter with Pender. Looking around the room, the names of the great middleweights from his era stared back at you.

"It was about survival," said Downes, reflecting back on his bouts with Pender, Giardello, Tuzo Portuguez, Jimmy Beecham, and Don Fullmer, whom he managed to beat despite breaking his hand in the opening round.

"Back then, there were a lot of fighters that never became champions, like Gil Turner and Holly Mims. I used to spar with Mims in Washington. He was a great mechanic and knew the game inside out. He could play with you.

"I love boxing," Downes said as he sat back down on his couch, picked up his pipe once more, and looked out the window onto his garden. "I was dedicated to it for most of my life, and it's given me the life that I live and it has made me what I am. How can I not love it?" ■

Tris Dixon is a London-based freelance writer.

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October 2004 (100-Page Extra): The Executioner: There's No Escape For De La Hoya! Also: Verno Phillips, Jose Luis Castillo, Felix Sturm, James Toney, Jeff Lacy, one-punch kayos

Fall 2004: Trinidad vs. Mayorga: Comeback Or Calamity. Also: Vitali Klitschko, Marco Antonio Barrera, Juan Diaz, Jimmy Clabby.

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All 5 $22	☐ Dec/87	☐ Sep/90	☐ Jan/95	☐ Feb/99	☐ May/01	☐ Aug/03
	All 6 $25	☐ Nov/90	☐ May/95	☐ Mar/99	☐ Jun/01	☐ Sep/03
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SUMMARY

HEAVYWEIGHTS

Lawrence Clay-Bey KO 8 Otis Tisdale
Nicolay Valuev KO 9 Paolo Vidoz
Kendrick Releford W 12 Eliecer Castillo
Robert Davis KO 2 Ray Phillips
Fabio Moli KO 2 Manuel Azar
Sultan Ibragimov KO 4 Najee Shaheed
Eddie Chambers W 10 Ron Guerrero
Ruslan Chagaev KO 3 Willie Williams
Malik Scott W 8 Louis Monaco
China Smith W Disq. 8 Russell Chasteen
Rob Calloway KO 2 Andy Sample
Tony Tubbs KO 1 Brian Sargent
Colin Wilson W 10 Auckland Auimatagi
Timor Ibragimov KO 1 Shawn Robinson
Taras Bidenko KO 1 Peter Simko
Roger Izonritei KO 4 Nathan Briggs
Cyril Seror KO 3 Marcelo Ferreira
John Poore KO 1 Franklin Edmondson
David Rodriguez KO 1 Travis Fulton

CRUISERWEIGHTS

Dale Brown W 12 Jermell Barnes
Pietro Aurino KO 7 Adrian Pop
Michael Simms KO 1 Victor Maciel
Rich LaMontagne KO 1 Allen Smith
Lou Del Valle W 6 James Johnson
Chris Thomas W 10 Tipton Walker
Lee Swaby KO 7 Denzil Browne

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS

Anthony Mundine KO 3 Juarne Dowling
Clinton Woods KO 12 Jason DeLisle

PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY IMAGES

Junior lightweight Willie Limond lands a jab against Frederic Bonifai

Danilo Haussler W 8 Ruben Groenewald
Daniel Judah KO 6 Ray Berry
Jose Luis Lopez KO 4 Warren Moore
Kirino Garcia KO 8 Arturo Rivera
Etienne Whitaker KO 2 Tony Spain
Fred Moore W 10 James Lubwama
Antonio Brancalion KO 6 Gabor Halasz
Lucian Bute KO 3 Willard Lewis
Rayco Saunders W 8 Ronald Boddie
Aneudi Santos KO 4 Aaron Norwood

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Markus Beyer KO 6 Cristian Sanavia
(Regains WBC Title)
Joe Calzaghe W 12 Kabary Salem
Kingsley Ikeke KO 5 Rene Arostegui
Scott Pemberton KO 3 James Crawford
Yusef Mack KO 8 Shannon Miller
Vitali Tsypko W 12 Lawrence Chapman
Yory Boy Campas W 10 Gabriel Holguin
Mger Mkrtchian W 8 Eliseo Nogueira
Yoshinori Nishizawa KO 2 Inoke Beresi
Dorian Beaupierre KO 5 Jacob Rodriguez
Rubin Williams W 10 Tim Bowe
John Duddy KO 1 Victor Paz

MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Mpush Makembi W 12 Peter Mashamaite
Marcos Primera KO 6 Lloyd Joseph
Sakio Bika KO 10 Yoshihiro Araki
Chad Dawson W 10 Darnell Wilson
Gianfranco Rosi KO 6 Peter Zsilak
Gustavo Magallanes KO 9 Ricardo Olmeda

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS

Francisco Mora KO 5 Jairo Siris
Aslanbek Kodzoev KO 9
Julio Cesar De La Cruz
Jozsef Matolcsi KO 8
Gotthard Hinteregger
Joachime Alcine KO 5
Fernando Hernandez
Jose Celaya KO 6 James Buggs
Germaine Sanders KO 2 Fray Luis Sierra
John Molnar D 6 Juan Carlos Escobar
Ante Bilic KO 9 Sasha Shnip

WELTERWEIGHTS

Emmanuel Clottey W 10 Michael Warrick
Henry Bruseles Tech. Draw 3 Ener Julio
Christopher Smith KO 10 Dillon Carew

Juan Carlos Rubio D 10 Adrian Mora
Edwin Vazquez W 12 Ruben Fuchu
Walter Matthysse KO 8 Carlos Jerez
Chad Bennett W 12 Ruben Diaz
Antonio Lauri KO 1 Stephane Jacob
Jackson Osei Bonsu KO 8
Fabrice Colombel
Sven Paris W 10 Vincenzo Finzi
Chucky T KO 5 Jimmy LeBlanc
Roque Cassiani W 6 Mauricio Borquez
Tony Lauri KO 1 Stephane Jacob
Kendall Holt W 6 Roberto Ortega
David Jackson W 8 Darrelle Sukerow
Herman Ngoudjo KO 6 Joshua Smith

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS

Vivian Harris KO 11 Oktay Urkal
(Retains WBA Title)
Cesar Bazan W 10 Francisco Campos
Souleymane Mbaye W 12
Andreas Kotelnik
Jose Armando Santa Cruz W 10
Lamar Murphy
Mike Arnaoutis KO 1 Jesse Feliciano
Jungbum Kim KO 2 Masakazu Satake
Paul Delgado W 6 Miguel Alvarez
Mia St. John W 4 Janae Archuleta

LIGHTWEIGHTS

Juan Diaz W 12 Julien Lorcy
(Retains WBA Title)
Victoriano Sosa KO 1 Marcos Hernandez
Stefano Zoff KO 10 Michele Delli Paoli
Ebo Elder KO 5 Ricardo Fuentes
Aldo Rios KO 8 Cristian Paz
Edner Cherry W 12 Jaime Rangel
Yuri Romanov W 10 Sergey Starkov
Ryuhei Sugita W 10
Muangfahlek Kiatwichean
Nico Salzmann W 10 Ondra Skala
Jairo Ramirez W 10 Gabriel Vasquez
Ivan Valle W 6 Armando Cordoba
Americo Santos KO 4 Corey Alarcon
Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. KO 1 Mike Walker

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS

Jorge Barrios KO 7 Carlos Uribe
Nedal Hussein KO 1 Decho Bankluaygym
Alex Arthur KO 6 Eric Odumase
Randy Suico KO 8 Ibrahim Aroby
Boris Sinitsin W 12 Craig Docherty
Pongsith Wiangwiset KO 2
Melvin Ayudtod
Nobuhito Honmo W 10
Tsuyoshi Nakamura
Steven Luevano W 10 Cristian Favela

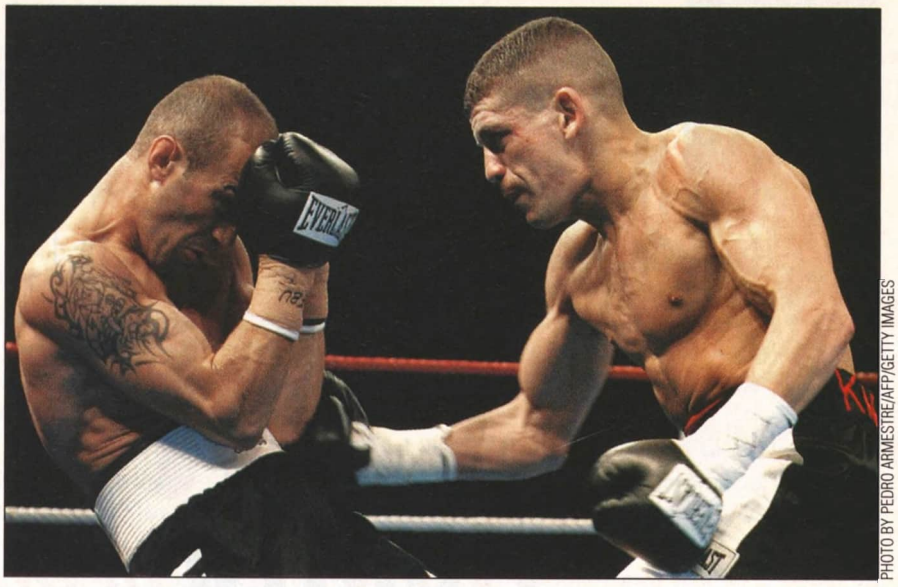

PHOTO BY PEDRO ARMESTRE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Karim Quibir Lopez goes to the body during his European bantam title fight with Simone Maludrottu

Saddam Kietyongyuth W 12
Rud 4K Kevkatche
Urbano Antillon KO 6
Juan Carlos Martinez
Willie Limond W 8 Frederic Bonifai
Agnaldo Nunes D 8 Isidro Granados

FEATHERWEIGHTS

Scott Harrison KO 1 Samuel Kebede
Agapito Sanchez W 10 Rogers Mtagwa
Edel Ruiz W 12 Victor Santiago
Saohin Sithchai Condo KO 7
Serikzhan Yshmagambetov
Fahprakorb Rakkiatgym KO 5 Jack Asis
Nicky Cook W 12 Johny Begue
Hector Marquez KO 2 Francisco Dianzo
Jimrex Jaca Tech. Win 5 Isamu Sakashita
Chonlatarn Piriyapinyo KO 12
Joen Honno
Juan Gerardo Cabrera W 12
Claudio Tapia
Tommy Browne W 10 Rudy Lopez
Cristobal Cruz KO 8 Cornelius Lock
Jose Aguiniga W 8 Alex Baba
Jose Diaz W 4 Tony Espinosa

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS

Jorge Lacierva D 10 Armando Guerrero
Toshiaki Nishioka W 10
Yoshikane Nakajima
Daniel Ponce De Leon KO 3
Emmanuel Lucero
Hugo Dianzo KO 5 Miguel Angel Munguia
Juan Ruiz W 10 Giovanni Urbina
Rodolfo Martinez W 12 Julio Cesar Avila
Al Seeger W 12 Luis Rivera
Saenghiran Lookbanyai W 12
Dondon Lapuz
Shigeru Nakazato D 10 Shoji Kimura
Zolani Marali W 12 Bonani Hlwatika
Yasuo Kunimi Tech. Win 5 Heungsik Lim

BANTAMWEIGHTS

Genaro Garcia KO 6 Oscar Arciniega
Jose Navarro KO 3 Miguel Del Valle
Wladimir Sidorenko W 12 Leo Gamez
Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym W 12
Michael Domingo
Simone Maludrottu W 12
Karim Quibir Lopez
Hozumi Hasegawa W 10 Jun Toriumi
Sasha Baktin W 10 Hisataka Ikemori

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS

Omar Narvaez KO 10 Wellington DaSilva
Medgoen Singsurat KO 8
Katsumi Makiyama
Pramuansak Phosuwan W 12
Sherwin Paro

FLYWEIGHTS

Pongsaklek Wonjongkam W 10
Randy Mangubat
(Non-Title Bout)
Pichit Siriwat W 6 Allan Ranada
Daisuke Naito KO 1 Takeyuki Kojima
Denkaosaen Kaowichit W 12
Reymond Malya
Diosdado Gabi W 10 Sairung Suwanasil
Francisco Arce W 6 German Cruz

STRAWWEIGHTS

Yutaka Niida W 12 Juan Landaeta
(Retains WBA Title)

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The RING

FIGHTER *of the* MONTH

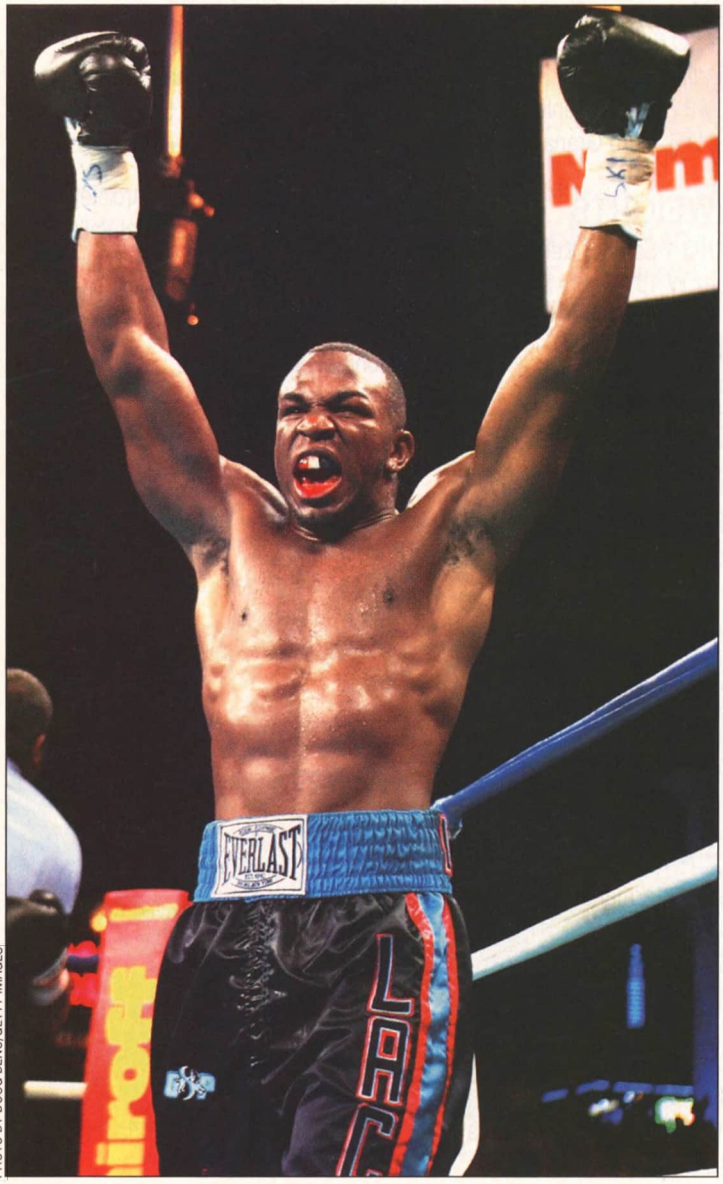


PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

There comes a time in every prospect's career when he has to step up and face an opponent who's capable of defeating him. Through his first 17 bouts, that time hadn't yet come for Jeff Lacy. Sure, guys like Ross Thompson, Richard Grant, and Donnell Wiggins were competent pros, but none of them ever had a prayer against the vastly more talented Lacy.

Syd Vanderpool was different, however. Vanderpool, a legitimate top-10 super middleweight, represented an enormous leap in class for the 2000 U.S. Olympian. If Lacy wasn't quite as good as the hype suggested, or if it turned out he couldn't adapt in a difficult fight, Vanderpool was capable of taking him to school.

As it turns out, Lacy was worthy of the hype and surprisingly good at adapting to adversity. He looked in trouble as southpaw Vanderpool controlled the first two rounds, but Lacy grew stronger as the rounds went by and never lost faith in what his fists could do. By the sixth round, he was hurting Vanderpool, and by the eighth, it was all over.

So slide Lacy over from the "pampered prospect" column into the "legit contender" column. And, while you're at it, slide him into the "Fighter of the Month" column as well.

• • • •

Jeff Lacy

RINGSIDE REPORTS

Rosendo Alvarez W 12 Beibis Mendoza

New York, New York: If Alvarez and Mendoza fought 100 times (and no, Don King, we're not asking for that), you get the feeling 99 of the fights would end in a too-close-to-call decision. Since Mendoza upset Alvarez back in August 2000 via seventh-round disqualification, "El Bufalo" has gone on to beat Mendoza three times on debatable decisions, the most recent being a split nod on the off-TV portion of the Felix Trinidad-Ricardo Mayorga show at Madison Square Garden.

Alvarez came into the fight as both THE RING junior flyweight champion and the WBA titleholder, but he didn't even come close to making the 108-pound limit, weighing in at 113½ initially and 111½ on his second try. The Nicaraguan was stripped by the WBA immediately and relieved of THE RING belt when he declared after the fight that he would not fight at 108 again, but both straps were available for Mendoza, 107½, to claim with a victory. Yet again, the Colombian fell just short.

The first four rounds ping-ponged back and forth, with all three judges and THE RING in agreement that Mendoza carried the first and third, Alvarez the second and fourth. The pace was slow in the first round, but it picked up from then on, with the skillful vets engaging in warfare that was evenly balanced between slugging and boxing, offense and defense. Mendoza landed an excellent left-right to Alvarez' sturdy chin in the third, but the stronger Alvarez seemed to be imposing his will by the end of round four.

The fifth was close, but by the sixth and seventh rounds, the 30-year-old Mendoza had come back and imposed his own will, using more jabs and setting a faster pace that Alvarez, 34, couldn't quite match. Through eight, Mendoza had a slight lead on THE RING's card and on two of the judges' scoresheets.

Over the final third of the fight, however, El Bufalo charged hard. He wasn't dominating rounds, but he was winning them, rallying at key moments and landing eye-catching powershots. The 12th was probably Alvarez' best round of the fight, as he scored with everything from double jabs to four-punch combos to sweep the closing stanza on all cards.

Nevertheless, Tom Schreck (USA) had it 115-113 for Mendoza. He was overruled by Dick Flaherty (USA) and Glenn Feldman (USA), who had 115-113 and 116-112, respectively, for Alvarez. THE RING finished with Alvarez on top, 116-113.

"I felt super fine in the ring, and I know I won that fight," said Mendoza, 30-3 (24), afterward. "Alvarez has been and continues to be an irresponsible person. He came in 3½ pounds overweight, but I felt I beat him even though he had an unfair weight advantage. This is very difficult for me to take, as I was dreaming of winning the title."

"Nothing affected me more in this fight than my opponent. My weight was not an issue," said a sportsmanlike Alvarez. "I fought a gladiator for the fourth time, and every time has been a war."

The referee was Pete Santiago (USA).

Promoter: Don King Productions

(10-2-04)

Eric Raskin

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Alvarez catches Mendoza en route to another tight win

Zab Judah KO 1 Wayne Martell

New York, New York: Some fighters save their best performances for their biggest fights. Others look their best when it matters least. The immensely talented Judah fits into the latter category. But we suppose that's better than *never* looking good.

In a dreadful mismatch against fellow southpaw Martell on the Trinidad-Mayorga undercard, Judah took care of business in dominant fashion, winning in just two minutes, eight

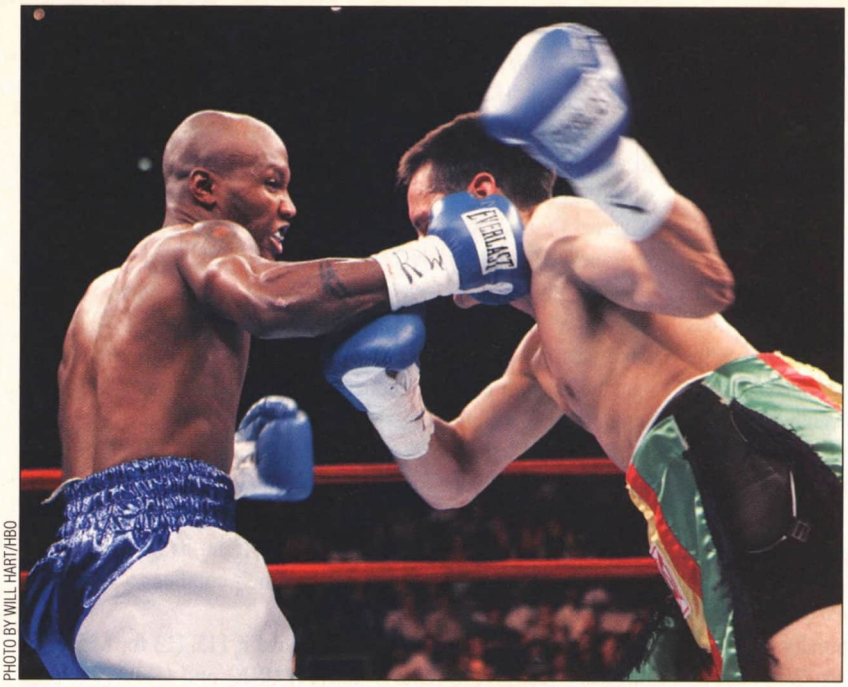


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Martell flops awkwardly into a right hook

seconds. The headdress-sporting Martell was billed during Michael Buffer's introductions as "The Pride Of The Chippewa Nation," but he left his fellow Chippewa with little to be proud of, as he hit the canvas nearly every time Judah touched him.

Judah, 147, Brooklyn, New York, received a decent pop from the MSG crowd during the introductions, and he proceeded to deliver some decent pops of his own from the moment the opening bell rang. Just 40 seconds in, a left cross from Judah floored Martell, 146¼, Minto, North Dakota, who promptly pounded the canvas in anger and popped right up just two ticks into the count of referee Benji Esteves (USA). Martell admirably went after Judah when the action resumed, but he was wholly ineffective, and a left behind the ear soon put him down again. Moments later, a flurry of punches dropped the 30-year-old Martell for a third time, and though he appeared clear-headed, the scene was becoming ridiculous.

Another shot soon knocked Martell off-balance and caused his gloves to touch down, prompting a fourth count from Esteves. By this time, Martell was bleeding under his right eye. The 26-year-old Judah staggered him with a right-left combination, then followed with another right-left, and Esteves stepped in to halt the slaughter just as Martell, 24-3 (15), was falling yet again. Had it gone on much longer, it's conceivable that we could have been looking at a 10-0 round. According to CompuBox stats, Judah landed nearly as many punches (27) as Martell threw (28).

"I felt great fighting in my hometown and I did spectacular," said Judah, 32-2 (23) with 1 no-contest. "I am very powerful at 147, and my next opponent must be Cory Spinks. That's it. I got the job done, and I'm one step closer to Spinks."

A rematch with world welterweight champion Spinks, who narrowly outpointed Judah in April '04, is reportedly in the works for early-'05.

Television: HBO Pay-Per-View

Promoter: Don King Productions

(10-2-04)

Eric Raskin

Travis Simms W 12 Bronco McKart

New York, New York: Age is only a number—a number that is sometimes not as important as the number of fights a man has had. In a battle of 33-year-old southpaw junior middleweights at Madison Square Garden, the fresher Simms, a six-year pro now seemingly entering his prime, had a bit too much for the grizzled McKart, who's been fighting as a pro for twice as long and has engaged in more than twice as many fights.

McKart, still a viable opponent but definitely past his best (he was 39-2 (27) in the '90s and is just 8-4 (4) in the '00s), kept most of the rounds competitive, but was usually a half-step behind and suffered a clear unanimous decision loss. For Simms, this win on the Trinidad-Mayorga undercard proved quite a bit. After entering the 154-pound mix with a somewhat fluky kayo win over Alex Garcia last December, the workmanlike victory over McKart cemented his status as a top contender.

It was clear from the outset that Simms had the faster hands, and the fight wasn't 30 seconds old before McKart's nose was reddening. McKart, 154, Detroit, Michigan, stayed in a defensive shell for

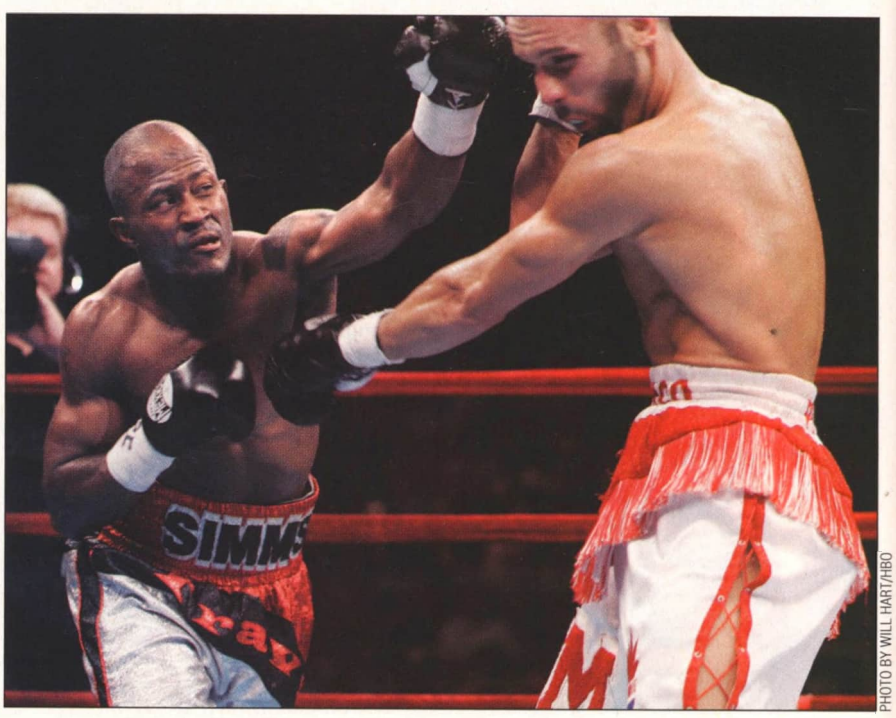


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Simms' quick left clips McKart on the temple

most of the first two rounds, handing Simms, 153½, Norwalk, Connecticut, the early lead. McKart got aggressive in the third, however, and the fight got exciting in a hurry. Simms scored the round's best punch, a cracking left hand behind a jab, but McKart finished many of the exchanges, and the round ended in a staredown that brought the crowd to its feet.

Despite a cut suffered under his right eye in the fourth, Simms was on his game, scoring with an assortment of punches to the head and body. After that, the pace slowed, and several of the middle rounds were extremely close. By the eighth—a strong round for Simms—the crowd had mostly lost interest, preferring to boo middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins' entrance to the arena rather than follow the action in the ring.

Simms continued to come on in the ninth, 10th, and 11th, even though blood flowed from the New Englander's mouth in round 10 and his right eye was closing from underneath in the 11th. McKart landed a good left hand late in the 12th to pull out the close round on all cards, but it was too late to make a difference.

Judge Oscar Perez (Dominican Republic) scored it 118-110, Don Ackerman (USA) had it 117-111, and Arthur Mercante Sr. (USA) saw it 116-112, the same as THE RING. The referee was Hubert Earle (Canada).

"I think I followed him around a bit too much, but I wanted to be aggressive and do my job," said McKart, 47-6 (31). "Simms deserved the win, and now I go back to the drawing board."

"I fought and beat one of the best fighters in the division that few boxers want to face," said Simms, 24-0 (18). "Now I want the winner of Winky Wright-Shane Mosley."

Although Simms holds the meaningless non-"super" version of the WBA title, he apparently understands whom he has to go through to become the real champion.

Television: HBO Pay-Per-View
Promoter: Don King Productions
(10-2-04)
Eric Raskin

Ricky Hatton KO 5 Mike Stewart

Manchester, England: Despite the frustration of not yet securing his breakthrough fight, Hatton, 139¾, produced his best performance of a lackluster year as he stopped for the first time the durable Stewart, 139¼, New Castle, Delaware, at the MEN Arena. It was just what the pride of Manchester needed after his two previous outings, against Wilfredo Vilches and Dennis Pedersen, both left him feeling that his career was stagnating. Winning this IBF junior welterweight title eliminator means that the plan for Hatton is to meet the winner of November's Kostya Tszyu-Sharmba Mitchell rematch.

"I feel fantastic that the chance will be there for me to prove I'm a champion," said the 26-year-old Hatton, 37-0 (27). "Stewart went 12 rounds with Mitchell this year here in Manchester and hurt him and actually came on strong in the late rounds (Stewart was also floored three times). I've beaten Vince Phillips more convincingly than Mitchell did. I beat Ben Tackie more convincingly than either Tszyu or Mitchell did (that point could be debated). I keep proving that I'm the real deal, and tonight was very satisfying."

Hatton's hard hooking to the body, particularly with his left hand, had a crippling effect. Hatton had Stewart, 36-3-2 (20), on the floor midway through the opening round from a left hook to the midsection. A right hook to the chin put Stewart, 26, down a second time, and a first-round knockout seemed possible.

"I thought he was going to stop him in the opening round," said an admiring Amir Khan, Britain's Olympic silver medalist, at ringside. "The bell saved Stewart, but Ricky maintained constant pressure on him and he just had to wilt."

Not all of Hatton's work, however, was to trainer Billy Graham's liking. In his view, Hatton began to "smother his work" and not give Stewart "time to hang himself."

"Sometimes less is more," Graham emphasized. "I wanted Stewart to open up so that Ricky could really plant his shots to the vital areas, but Ricky went into Tasmanian Devil mode. In the end, though, he got the job done very effectively."

After sustaining a couple of right hands and left hooks, inevitable consequences of Hatton's aggressive style, "The Hitman" appeared to be back to his ruthless best in the fifth round, overwhelming Stewart with a left hook to the jaw that put him down for the third time. Stewart's pained expression was testament to the precision quality of Hatton's work, and referee Dave Parris (England) waved it over at 2:57 of the round.

PHOTO BY ALEX LIVESEY/GETTY IMAGES

Hatton pounds "No Joke" along the ropes

As Stewart was departing the arena, someone asked him if his nose was broken. "I think a lot of things might be broken," he replied. "Man, he hit me hard all over, but those shots to the body, I didn't expect 'em and I didn't see 'em. They hurt. The way Ricky digs to the body especially, I'd give him a go with anybody."

(10-1-04)

Promoter: Sports Network

Brian Doogan

Jeff Lacy KO 8 Syd Vanderpool

Las Vegas, Nevada: Lacy was determined to be the first boxer from the 2000 U.S. Olympic team to become a major titleholder, and his determination certainly paid off when he stopped skillful veteran Vanderpool to capture the vacant IBF super middleweight belt.

"This was my Olympics," the 27-year-old Lacy said afterward. "I got my gold medal. It was all about me. I'm going to walk around with this belt."

In front of 4,100 fans at the new Caesars Palace outdoor arena, Canadian southpaw Vanderpool, 167, won the first couple of rounds by using his footwork and snapping right jab to keep the stalking Lacy, 168, St. Petersburg, Florida, at a distance. The 32-year-old Vanderpool seemed to control the leisurely pace, but Lacy was constantly making Vanderpool work, cutting off the ring and landing occasional solid right hands.

Vanderpool, 35-3 (23), who went the distance with middleweight king Bernard Hopkins in 2000, said he learned a lot from that fight. He admitted he was trying to keep Lacy, 17-0 (14) with 1 no-contest, away with his awkward southpaw style, but the stronger Lacy picked up the pace after the fourth and started to hurt Vanderpool with right uppercuts and powerful left hooks to the body. Vanderpool's best punch was his straight left hand that caught Lacy as he came forward, but it was not enough to stop the younger man's onslaught.

The sixth round was all Lacy as he landed a clean right uppercut and left hook that caused Vanderpool's legs to wobble for the first time in the fight. Lacy tried for the finish, but the experienced Vanderpool survived the rest of the round.

In the seventh and eighth rounds, Vanderpool continued going downhill as Lacy made the Canadian fight toe-to-toe. "Left Hook" Lacy landed a double left uppercut that shook Vanderpool and had him stumbling back in serious trouble. A quick flurry of punches from Lacy was enough to make referee Robert Byrd (USA) step in—arguably a few punches too soon—to save Vanderpool at 1:37 of the eighth.

Vanderpool didn't outright complain about the stoppage, but he seemed to think he wasn't out of the fight. "Lacy was throwing everything he had at me," Vanderpool said. "I thought he was going to get tired."

Lacy called out Joe Calzaghe, generally recognized as the top man at 168 pounds, but also said he could drop to middleweight or move up to light heavyweight to get meaningful fights. Lacy wasted little time scheduling his first title defense, a December 4 match against onetime Calzaghe victim Omar Sheika.

Television: Showtime

Promoter: Gary Show Productions

(10-2-04)

Wayne McCullough

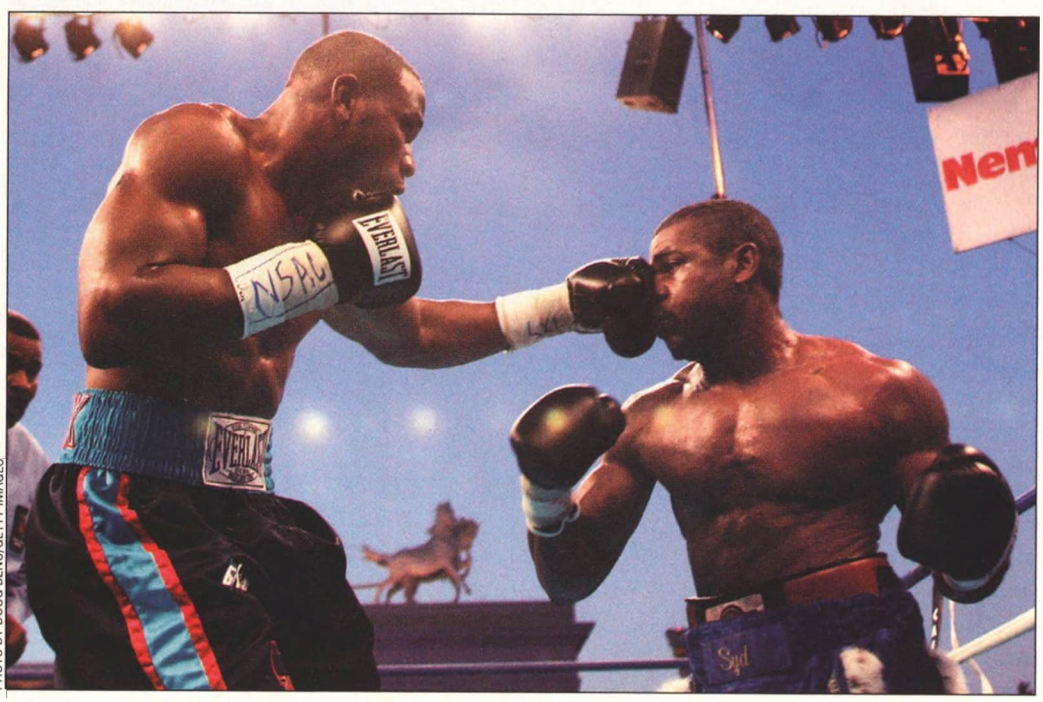
Wladimir Klitschko Tech. Win 5 DaVarryl Williamson

Las Vegas, Nevada: Klitschko ran out of steam in his previous fight, against Lamon Brewster, losing by TKO in the fifth after having Brewster on the canvas in the fourth. His fight against Williamson at the new Caesars Palace outdoor arena might have been heading in the same direction, but Klitschko pulled out a split technical win when the bout was stopped at the end of the fifth because of a headbutt that opened up a nasty gash on Klitschko's forehead.

"This was not an easy fight tonight," Klitschko said afterward. "Williamson is a good fighter. I felt I was winning the fight."

Klitschko, 244, Kiev, Ukraine, started the fight controlling the shorter Williamson, 218, Denver, Colorado, with his long, snapping left jab. Williamson retreated on the back foot and gave Klitschko lots of movement. A good left hook from Klitschko landed, but Williamson took it well and came straight back with a counter jab of his own.

These well educated heavyweights—Klitschko has a doctorate in sports science and philosophy, and Williamson holds a masters degree in administrative



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Lacy flattens Vanderpool's nose with a left

PHOTO BY DOUG BENC/GETTY IMAGES

Williamson scores with the knockdown punch in the fourth

services—seemed on the verge of making things exciting, but the stand-up-straight style of Klitschko instead kept the pace slow throughout the second round.

In the third round, however, Klitschko, 28, landed a couple of straight right hands that knocked Williamson's head back. Williamson, 36, who got kayoed in one round by Joe Mesi in 2003, showed that he could take Klitschko's shots, but it still seemed like the towering Ukrainian was in control.

That changed just 35 seconds into the fourth, when Klitschko threw a right hand and Williamson countered with his own right that landed on Klitschko's chin. Klitschko stumbled backward and momentarily touched the canvas, prompting referee Jay Nady (USA) to start a count. Klitschko jumped straight back up and seemed unhurt, but Williamson came after him, trying to finish it as the 4,100 fans rose to their feet. Klitschko completed the round stronger than he had started, and may have deserved to win it if not for the knockdown.

In the fifth, Klitschko, 43-3 (39), was controlling the tempo with his left jab, although he was slowing badly. Williamson, 20-3 (17), was content to move defensively around the ring, away from Klitschko, hoping to take him into the latter part of the fight.

At the very end of the round, a clash of heads opened up a severe cut on Klitschko's forehead. The ringside physician, Dr. Margaret Goodman, examined the cut and advised the referee that the fight be stopped. She explained, "It was a vertical, jagged laceration on the right side that went to the bone. The cut went below the level of the brow, down to where the nerves control the pupil."

The bout had gone past the fourth round, so the fight went to the scorecards. Judges Chuck Giampa (USA) and Jerry Roth (USA) both scored the bout 49-46 for Klitschko, overruling Doug Tucker (USA), who saw it 48-47 for Williamson. THE RING had it 48-46 for Klitschko.

"We wanted him to slow because of what we had seen against Brewster," Williamson stated. "That was the plan. My fight is conditioning from rounds five through 10. That's what we planned all along and things were going to plan."

Emanuel Steward, Klitschko's trainer, explained Wladimir's recent struggles: "You must remember that for the most part, early in their careers, the Klitschko brothers fought in Germany in control-type situations. Now they're over here with the big boys."

Television: Showtime

Promoter: Gary Show Productions

(10-2-04)

Wayne McCullough

Markus Beyer KO 6 Cristian Sanavia

Erfurt, Germany: A controversial win by split decision for Sanavia, 165¾, Piove di Sacco, Italy, in June in Beyer's hometown of Chemnitz, Germany, led inevitably to this rematch at the Messehalle, which for five rounds appeared destined to end in another victory for the Italian. But Beyer, 167, demonstrated in the sixth that he still has some fire in the belly, knocking Sanavia out to claim the WBC super middleweight title for the third time. It was Sanavia's first defense.

The 33-year-old German won the belt for the first time in 1999 in Telford, England, the hometown of his opponent, Richie Woodhall. He made one defense before being stopped in the final round by another Briton, Glenn Catley, in May 2000. A disputed split decision against Canada's Eric Lucas won him the belt again in 2003, but his loss to Sanavia seemed to signal the end.

"What it did was give me motivation to come back and win the title one more time," Beyer declared. "I knew in my heart I could beat him."

It did not look likely in the opening two rounds, when Sanavia, 33-2 (12), a former European middleweight titleholder, floored Beyer twice with left hooks, a punch he landed repeatedly as Beyer struggled to handle the style and contain the energy of his fellow southpaw. After five rounds, Beyer was three points behind on all three judges' scorecards. A dramatic turnaround was going to be necessary.

In the sixth, he made the turnaround happen, landing a right-left to Sanavia's chin and a final, devastating left to the jaw. Sanavia, 29, fell and was counted out by referee Ian John Lewis 44 seconds into the round.

"I just relaxed and he caught me with a punch I didn't see coming, that's what happened," said a stunned Sanavia, who suggested he would return to campaigning at middleweight.

Beyer, 30-2 (12), is being targeted by Australia's Danny Green, the holder of the WBC's interim belt at 168. Green lost to Beyer by disqualification in 2003 in a fight he had been dominating.

"I will be doing everything I can to get the fight in Australia," said Green, though he must know that the veteran Beyer and his promoter, Wilfried Sauerland, will do everything they can to ensure that any rematch will take place on German turf.

(10-9-04)

Promoter: Wilfried Sauerland

Brian Doogan ■

New Face

(Continued from page 20)

hold and become a prize fighter.

"One day I went to the gym at about five o'clock after school and rang the door bell, but he wasn't there," recalled Rodriguez. "So I went around the back and couldn't find him, but I did my workout anyway. Later I get a phone call and hear that he was brutally murdered in his house. He got killed by one of his mistresses. I guess you could say she got jealous and blew his head off with a shotgun. That's when I decided that I wanted to take the sport seriously, and a lot of my fights are still dedicated to him."

Rodriguez began his pro career in 1998, but was plagued by a hand injury that sidelined him for two years after just four fights. Following successful surgery, he resumed his career in June of 2001 and has been trying to make up for lost time since. He has averaged a fight every two to three months for the last two years.

Rodriguez, 27, attributes his perfect 17-0 (17) record to his mix of speed and power. All but one of his bouts have ended in the first round, including his last fight, when he stopped Travis Fulton, 8-7 (8), with a left hook to the body in El Paso on October 22.

"I know a good body attack," Rodriguez said. "That's what I learned growing up in El Paso and going to the Mexican gyms in Juarez. The best punch would probably be my hook, but then again, my right hand has put a lot of guys down, so I'm a devastating puncher with both hands."

Of course, the quality of Rodriguez' opponents has been less than stellar; only six of his opponents had winning records and his first 12 opponents had a combined record of 24-61. He acknowledges the need to play catch-up in the experience arena, but remains unapologetic for the parade of lower-level fighters that comprise his dossier.

"I know anyone in the heavyweight division can punch, I don't care if the guy is 0-0 as a fighter," Rodriguez said. "Every time I'm in the ring, I'm tested. I don't look beyond anybody. I don't care if it's Lennox Lewis, Mike Tyson, or Joe Palooka."

What he lacks in level of opposition, Rodriguez tries to make up for in quality of sparring. He has periodic stints at the Main Boxing Gym in Houston and Freddie Roach's Wild Card Boxing Club in Los Angeles where he spars with other up-and-coming heavyweights as well as seasoned veterans like Lou Savarese and Ahmad Abdin.

Rodriguez said his development as a fighter was greatly accelerated after former lightweight contender Louie Burke took over training duties shortly after Galarza's death. Rodriguez makes the 80-mile round trip commute from El Paso to Burke's gym in Las Cruces, New Mexico, five days a week to train.

"I really started learning how to box when I got with him," Rodriguez said. "Otherwise I would just be a tough-guy competitor who just goes in there and brawls. Louie started showing me how to box and things I never knew existed in the sport."

Rodriguez also credits his friend Rodriguez Chevez, a psychiatrist, for keeping him motivated and helping him through his bouts of depression during his two-year layoff. Chevez has walked Rodriguez into the ring for all of his fights to date.

"He set my mind straight," Rodriguez said. "Without him I don't know where I'd be today. I might be in trouble or I might be doing other things."

Reporter Felix Chavez of the *Las Cruces Sun-News* has witnessed Rodriguez' metamorphosis from a nervous, somewhat reluctant competitor to an eager and focused prospect over the last four years. Despite his relative inexperience for a six-year pro, Chavez said Rodriguez is young enough to be moved up vigilantly.

"I don't necessarily think that he's over-protected, although there are probably some who think he might be," Chavez said. "He didn't have a whole lot of amateur bouts. I know he wants to fight the best, he's getting that experience now and his manager [Bob Spagnola] and trainer are just trying to make sure that he's ready."

As a good-looking 6'5" Latino heavyweight, Rodriguez represents a marketing dream in boxing. He has gained a modest local following along the El Paso-Santa Fe corridor of Interstate 25 and one of his bouts was televised on Spanish-language TV, but his potential fan base transcends both national and cultural borders.

"There are not a lot of Hispanic heavyweights out there, so he's going to have a lot of appeal," Chavez said. "It's just a matter of getting him out there and getting him the exposure. He's got power and speed, and people want to see early knockouts."

Rodriguez has set himself a goal of winning the heavyweight title within the next two years. With lackluster fighters like John Ruiz and Chris Byrd occupying the top rungs of the drab division, the time is ideal for a charismatic knockout artist like Rodriguez to break onto the scene.

"There's no excitement in the heavyweight division," Rodriguez said. "I wouldn't say there are no good fighters; they're all good fighters, believe me. It's just that they have such strange styles that people get bored watching them on TV. Their styles are very difficult to beat and they're not flamboyant. They're not exciting punchers, and that's what I think I can bring to the division." ■

Peter Lim is a Houston-based freelance writer.

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FLASHBACK

Through The Years With "The Bible Of Boxing"

MAY 1954

COVER STORY: "The King Comes Home" Those who thought the alphabet gangs invented interim championships in the 1990s will be surprised to learn that these meddlesome caretaker titles have been around for decades. Today, they are a way for the governing bodies to keep collecting sanctioning fees while one of the titleholders is recovering from an injury. Back in 1954, it was a way to keep the turnstiles spinning while a champion was in the armed service. Regardless of the era, it's all about money.

With reigning featherweight champion Sandy Saddler doing a two-year hitch in the U.S. Army, Philadelphia slugger Percy Bassett stopped Ray Famechon in February '53 to win the interim 126-pound title. When Saddler was discharged in April '54, it seemed logical that he would reestablish himself by fighting Bassett, which prompted C.R. Schaare's cover illustration of Saddler and Bassett swapping punches and the accompanying article by Johnny Salak. But the match never took place.

Teddy "Red Top" Davis took the interim title away from Bassett in November, and then challenged Saddler for the legitimate championship in February '55, losing a 15-round decision.

"No Cinch For Rocky" With heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano set to defend against former champ Ezzard Charles, Associate Editor Dan Daniel reminded readers that no former heavyweight champion had ever regained the title, but also warned "Ezz has enough on the ball to be able to break the jinx" and predicted that it would be a "thrilling fight."

Although Charles didn't "break the jinx," he did provide Marciano with a "thrilling fight," so thrilling, in fact, they did it again later the same year.

"From Dawdler To Dynamo" That's how middleweight contender Joey Giardello was described in the headline of a feature article by Jack Hand. Giardello was coming off back-to-back knockouts of Garth Panter and Walter Cartier, which caused something of a stir because they were the first kayos he'd scored since 1951.

"I never wanted to finish off those guys," said Giardello of his

WORLD CHAMPIONS

(for the period ended March 18, 1954)

Heavyweight: Rocky Marciano
Light Heavyweight: Archie Moore
Middleweight: Bobo Olson
Welterweight: Kid Gavilan
Lightweight: Paddy DeMarco
Featherweight: Sandy Saddler
Bantamweight: Jimmy Carruthers
Flyweight: Yoshio Shirai

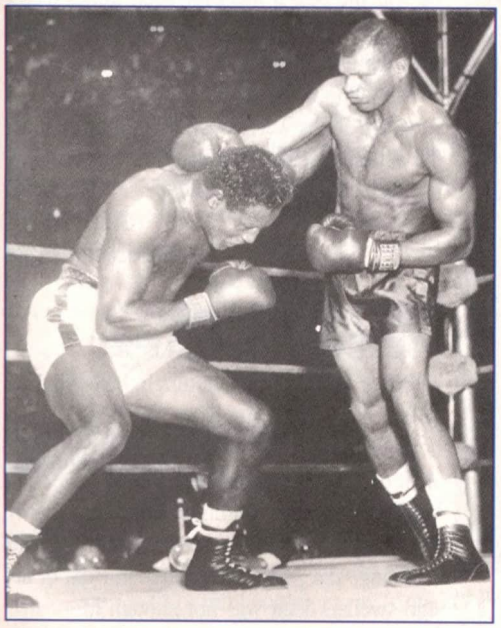
Giardello floors Cartier for the third and final time

dearth of knockouts. "I felt sorry when I hurt someone. We were all in the same business and I didn't want to see anybody get hurt. But my managers tell me the only way you can make any dough is to be a puncher. I guess they're right. It's Joltin' Joey from now on."

Giardello stuck to the plan for one more fight, stopping Willie Troy, but then it was back to winning the majority of his matches by decision.

"Johnson Dark Horse In Heavy Sweepstakes" Even though Charles was getting a crack at Marciano, he'd been upset the previous year by Harold Johnson, who held down the number-one position in the light heavyweight ratings. But as writer Jack Fried noted, Johnson "has the physical equipment, pugilistic talent, speed of movement, and experience to qualify as the likeliest candidate to succeed Rocky on the big throne."

As things turned out, Johnson never did get a chance to fight for the heavyweight title. Instead, six fights after beating Charles, he challenged Archie Moore for the 175-pound crown. Moore rallied from behind to kayo Johnson in the 14th round, and Johnson had to wait until 1962 before he finally captured the light heavyweight title with a 15-round decision over Doug Jones, who hadn't even turned pro when this issue was published.



Johnson fends off Charles for points win

"Paddy DeMarco: Fighter Of The Month" Brooklyn's DeMarco was honored for upsetting Jimmy Carter and winning the lightweight title. According to editor Nat Fleischer, "It was by the persistent and skillful use of his left that enabled DeMarco to bring about the upset victory." DeMarco gave Carter a rematch later the same year, losing the title when Carter knocked him out in the 15th round.

"The Wake Of Battling Nelson" When former lightweight champion Battling Nelson (Oscar Matthew Nielson) died in February '54, the Veteran Boxer's Association put up $300 for his funeral, which took place at Egan's Southside Mortuary in Chicago. Although "The Durable Dane" lost the title in 1910, hundreds turned out for his final public appearance to mourn the old champ and trade tales about his Hall of Fame career.

"In Sunny California" The lead item in Bill Miller's monthly column of West Coast news explored the controversial split decision Art Aragon scored over Chuck Davey at the Olympic Auditorium. Miller, who had Aragon ahead by one point, wrote that many among the disgruntled crowd of 10,400 had bet on Davey at 2-1 odds. ■

New lightweight king DeMarco

Reigning bantam champ Carruthers

COME OUT WRITING

Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.

HANGING AT THE HALL

I recently went to the International Boxing Hall of Fame cocktail party featuring Arturo Gatti and special guest Micky Ward. They are both really nice guys and gracious to the fans. Gatti and Ward autographed my "Year In Pictures" issue of THE RING ANNUAL, which has a photo of both of them landing punches on the cover. What a pleasure it was to meet them. I also met Carmen Basilio, who is a very animated character. He pick-pocketed my mobile phone and said I had to fight him to get it back. What a comedian!

WILL HENDRICKS
shadywizzle@msn.com

ASININE ACCUSATION

I'm writing in response to Mr. Mark Law's letter in the Fall 2004 issue of THE RING asking if Archie Moore took a dive in his fight with Rocky Marciano. That's the most ridiculous thing I've heard in quite a while. If Moore went into the tank, why did he put Marciano down early in the fight? The accusation makes as much sense as Jack Dempsey using plaster of Paris on his handwraps in the Jess Willard fight. I recall that Rocky was once approached by some shady characters and offered money to dive against Don Cockell. Marciano almost went berserk, saying that such men made him sorry he was Italian. Obviously, Rocky didn't do it, as Cockell was stopped in the ninth round and became Marciano's 48th victim.

JOHN SCHOCK
Mt. Clemens, MI

JONES COMES DOWN TO EARTH

Roy Jones' career may be on a downslide, but his fight analysis on HBO Pay-Per-View during the Felix Trinidad-Ricardo Mayorga battle was the best it has ever been. Jones didn't take every opportunity to talk about his career and abilities. He never bragged and was humorous about his losses to Antonio Tarver and Glen Johnson. Jones was also very insightful about the action. Besides being a great fighter, Roy may actually be likable now.

BILL LESLIE
Tiger62@tmail.com

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO

Popular warriors Arturo Gatti and Micky Ward share a laugh at the weigh-in for the final fight in their epic trilogy. Reader Will Hendricks writes to tell us about the great time he had recently while visiting with the gracious duo at the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York.

"EL MATADOR" NEEDS A CAPE

Ricardo Mayorga is a tough, ballsy fighter who is very entertaining to watch. But when he fought Felix Trinidad, the toughest opponent of his career, Mayorga should have used some of the basic fighting techniques. Simply stepping to the right or left, bobbing and weaving, and putting his hands in front of his ego-swelled head was not enough in a battle of that magnitude.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Ricardo Mayorga walks into a right uppercut thrown by Felix Trinidad during their exciting bout at Madison Square Garden. Reader John Armstrong appreciates "El Matador's" gutsy style, but feels that the former welterweight champion would benefit from a refresher course in boxing fundamentals.

Although the fight was exciting, Mayorga was nothing more than a stationary target at the end of Trinidad's hands. With more technique, "El Matador" could have made it even tougher for "Tito," or possibly even changed the outcome. After taking the worst beating of his career, I hope Mayorga will adjust his style and give us some more entertaining fights.

JOHN ARMSTRONG
Troy, NY

[Editor's note: Mayorga announced his retirement after returning home to Nicaragua, but if and when his legal difficulties are resolved, it wouldn't be too surprising if he has a change of heart.]

UNREALISTIC REALITY

I'm a boxing fan who reads and watches whenever I can, so naturally, I tuned in for Oscar De La Hoya's boxing reality show, *The Next Great Champ*. What a disappointment! They built up a fight between two professionals and then showed seven minutes of edited crap that hardly resembled a boxing match. There's plenty of time in the last 20 minutes to show a 12-minute fight. I have one word to describe this show: garbage.

DUSTIN REINHOLD
Chillicothe, OH

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Okay, THE RING eliminated the stench of the alphabet clans from your ratings, so why not expand to 20 fighters in each division? I'm also at a loss as to why you see fit to print comments in "Come Out Writing" about fights long past such as De La Hoya-Trinidad, Marciano-Moore, and the 50-round fight between Joe Jeannette and Sam McVey.

KURTIS WOLF
Glendale, AZ

[Editor's note: With so many divisions, it's tough enough to come up with 10 genuine world-class fighters in some of the weaker weight classes, let alone 20. As far as our "Come Out Writing" department is concerned, readers are welcome to comment on any aspect of boxing they wish.]

MISGUIDED MERCHANT

Just what is it that HBO's bard of boxing, Larry Merchant, doesn't like about Bernard Hopkins? Merchant's treatment of Hopkins after his big victory over De La Hoya seemed more antagonistic than analytical. Hopkins displayed poise in handling the cranky Merchant and would have won the popular vote between them on that evening. Hopkins' superb skill level at nearly 40 is remarkable and he should be admired as a great champion. Merchant is a top boxing analyst, but what is his problem with Hopkins?

ROBERT ATKINSON
Fenton, MI

GOOD "GOB"

I have been a close follower of the Sweet Science for nearly as long as I can remember, and I must give thanks to THE RING contributing to my education and enabling me to win countless arguments and a bet or two. I must confess, however, that I get a bit annoyed when experts describe the heavyweight champions between Gene Tunney and Joe Louis as "caretakers." Those men were champions and four of the five are in the Hall of Fame.

During my continuing research and study of films, I have become more and more impressed by Jack Sharkey. Perhaps his title reign was undistinguished, but I'm not sure many realize what a superb technician he was, as well as a solid puncher who was long past his prime when he won the championship. Many historians are quick to point out that Sharkey lost to Max Schmeling, Jack Dempsey, and Louis, and drew with Mickey Walker. But they ignore that he defeated Tommy Loughran, Mike McTigue, Young Stribling, and Harry Wills. Imagine what would have happened if "The Boston Gob" had kept his head when Dempsey peppered his nether region. Would historians have called Tunney a "caretaker"?

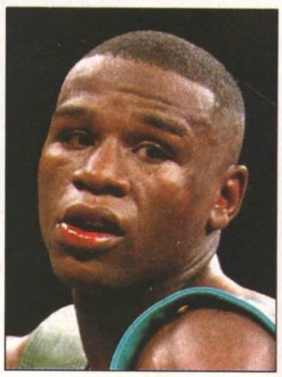
This photo of Jack Sharkey was taken in 1932, the year he beat Max Schmeling for the heavyweight championship. Reader Rolf McCabe is bothered by the lack of respect normally afforded "The Boston Gob" and thinks most historians underrate him.

ROLF McCABE
Monticello, NY ■

LOOKING AHEAD

By Eric Raskin

WILL MAYWEATHER COME ALIVE IN '05?



Mayweather: Hoping for a breakout year

It was more than six years ago, in the fall of 1998, that a then-21-year-old **Floyd Mayweather** became a star. And it seemed only a matter of time until he would make the leap to *super*star. But it didn't happen in '99. Or 2000. Or '01, '02, '03, or '04.

So will it finally happen in 2005? According to **Bruce Trampler**, matchmaker for Mayweather's promoter, Top Rank, it's "a definite maybe."

After entering the ring only once during a disappointing '04 campaign, Mayweather is expected to get a busier '05 started on January 22 when he headlines an HBO card against an opponent to be determined (**Vernon Forrest** will likely return in the co-feature). After that, "Pretty Boy" has a chance to make the leap. Trampler said he's "100 percent confident" that Mayweather will finally make his pay-per-view headlining debut against **Arturo Gatti** in either May or June, provided they both win their January fights and don't suffer problematic injuries.

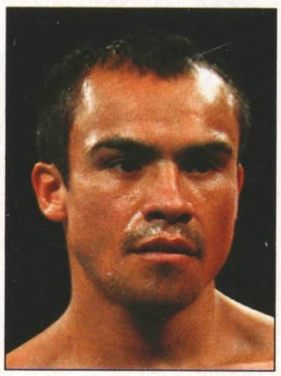
"[Top Rank Vice President] Todd duBoef and [Main Events Vice President] Carl Moretti have had numerous conversations on this," Trampler told THE RING. "It's a little intricate, in terms of the purse split and just how much money is available. But I think it's the biggest fight out there for both guys, and I don't see anything preventing it."

A win on PPV over Gatti would probably do more for Mayweather's star power than any other victory on his ledger. Previous opportunities to become a top-flight attraction have passed Mayweather by, but, at 27 and with a new HBO contract waiting to be negotiated, he's getting another chance.

"The kid started out on fire, but as we all know, he made a few foolish statements that he wishes he could take back and he's done a few things that have slowed down his ascent," said Trampler. "Floyd always felt that he was entitled to certain things, that he had certain things coming to him because of his talent. But he didn't understand how the marketplace worked. He didn't understand that HBO doesn't have to pay him any more than what they've paid him, because the next option is Showtime, and they can't pay as much as HBO.

"Will this be a breakthrough year for him? He's going to have to demonstrate on pay-per-view that he's a draw. He's had a few chances to fight on pay-per-view in the past, but he hasn't rolled the dice. This time he is, and it may pay off for him. We'll have to see. The Gatti fight could be a springboard, but Floyd will have to do all the right things outside the ring and do all the right things inside the ring if he's going to reach that next level."

LISTEN UP

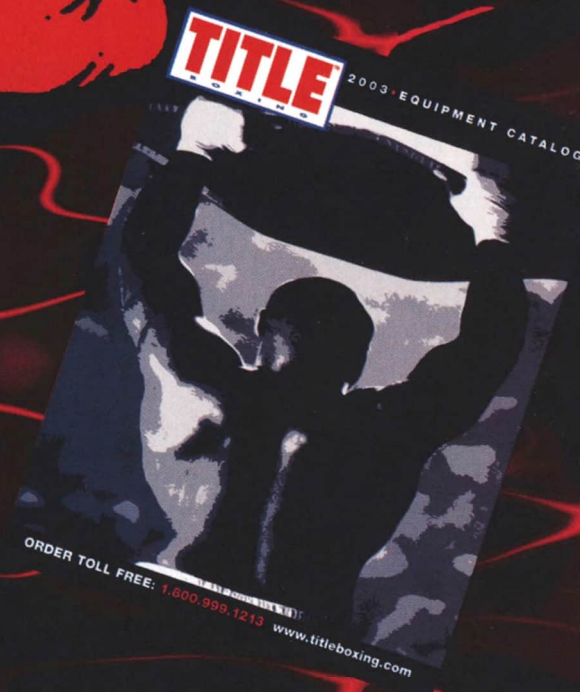


Marquez: Rematch with Pac-Man pending

Nothing was signed as of press time, but HBO has set aside February 26 for the featherweight title rematch between **Manny Pacquiao** and **Juan Manuel Marquez** ... The previous Saturday, February 19, is the planned date for **Bernard Hopkins'** 20th middleweight title defense. Number-one contender **Howard Eastman** appears the likely foe ... Onetime Hopkins victim **Felix Trinidad** will make the second appearance of his second career on March 12 on HBO PPV, against an opponent to be determined. One week later, presumably broadcast along with a replay of the Trinidad fight, onetime Trinidad victim **Fernando Vargas** returns on HBO ... There will be no *Showtime Championship Boxing* first-Saturday-of-the-month card in January (because the first Saturday is New Year's Day), but Showtime will be back with cards on February 5 and March 5 ... Promoter **Don King** is planning a pay-per-view show for January 22 (the same day Mayweather fights on HBO), with the welterweight championship rematch between **Cory Spinks** and **Zab Judah** the intended main event. Also penciled in for the card are the rescheduled **Wayne Braithwaite-Jean-Marc Mormeck** bout for the vacant RING cruiserweight title, a rematch between top-five cruisers **O'Neil Bell** and **Kelvin Davis**, and a heavyweight contest between **Monte Barrett** and unbeaten **Owen Beck** ... Speaking of pay-per-views, Top Rank has a "Latin Fury" PPV planned for February 12 ... On February 18, **Kermit Cintron** will headline one of ESPN2's "special" *Friday Night Fights* cards. ■

TITLE

BOXING



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